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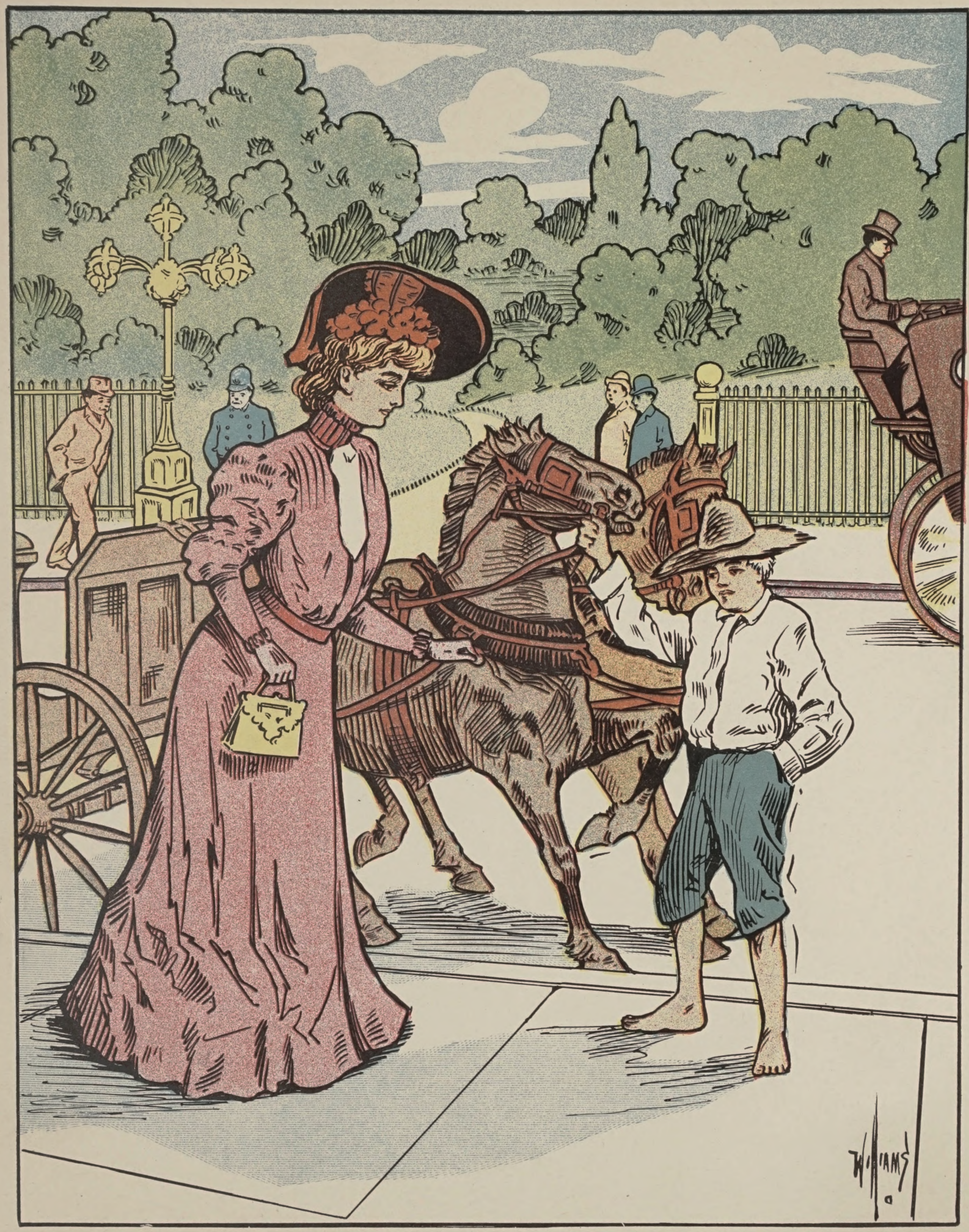

"I—I Don't Want to Take It."

Witch Crow and Barney Bylow

BY

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Author of "The Cabin in the Big Woods," "Ralph Marlowe,"
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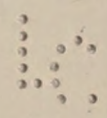

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WITCH CROW AND BARNEY BYLOW

Chapter I

BARNEY BYLOW was a farmer's son—an only child—twelve years old, red-headed and freckled; a quick-witted, self-reliant and sturdy youngster. His parents were not wealthy, but they owned the little farm on which they lived—and they owed no one. The big frame farmhouse, weather-beaten and gray, was cheery and comfortable—warm in winter and cool in summer; and the deep well in the corner of the yard, around which the hollyhocks and sunflowers smiled and nodded and dozed in the Summer sunshine, was an unfailing source of the clearest and coolest water in all the neighborhood. Past the door ran the winding, never-ending highway—dust-white in summer and snow-white in winter; and just across it were the big red barn, the stacks and sheds—and beyond, the fields and woods rolling away toward the creek valley a mile distant.

Everything about the Bylow farm and home was trim and well kept. Orchards, groves and fences, farmyard, garden and fields were clean and tidy. Horses were well fed and glossy; cattle were

fat and sleek; sheep and porkers were placid and content; and chickens, turkeys, and ducks were bustling and cheerful.

Mr. and Mrs. Bylow were a hard-working and happy couple. Round-faced and rosy, they slaved and saved that Barney—their darling and their pride—might have a prosperous future. The warmest desire of these loving hearts was that their son might grow up a man of means and influence. To this end they taught him to work and sent him to school; and constantly impressed upon his mind that he must form habits of industry and frugality.

But all this was just what Barney did not appreciate or enjoy. He felt that he was ill-used, that his lot was a hard one. Work was tiresome; school was distasteful. Play was all right; but labor was all wrong. True, it was good enough sport to hunt the eggs cunningly hidden deep in the fragrant hay of the great barn mow, and to ride the work horses to and from the fields; but, then, there were the long rows of corn to be hoed—where the heat waves shimmered and danced at noon—and the garden to be weeded. It was no great hardship, to be sure, to fetch the cows from pasture or to feed the fowls; but think of digging potatoes and picking up apples in the orchard! It was great fun, of course, to go fishing and swimming in the creek—as he was permitted to do almost every Saturday afternoon of the long summer; but consider for a moment the drudgery of carrying water and sheaves in the hot harvest field.

And he could go skating and coasting in winter; but at the close of every day he must get the firewood and do other odd chores. What a botheration! Was ever a boy more misused and put upon than he? The industry and thrift of his parents did not appeal to Barney. Work! Play was much more pleasant and profitable—so he decided. Economy! Money was made to be spent. Of what use was it otherwise? And there were so many things he needed and desired that his parents could not afford to buy—so they claimed. They asked him to work, and to go to school—to be cheerful and obedient; and all the while he wanted to roam in the woods, to do as he liked—to be his own master.

He had plenty of wholesome food; but what boy cares for wholesome food when his palate longs for ice-cream and chocolate candy? What boy cares whether his stomach is full of wholesome food—especially when it *is* full—whose head is full of ponies, pony-carts and harness? He had good rough-and-ready clothes for work and school, and a better suit for Sundays; but what right-minded youth appreciates mere homely raiment when his soul is famished for a gold watch and chain? The linen of the great four-poster bed in which he slept was spotless; but how could Barney give this fact due weight and credit, when his dreams were all of air-guns and bicycles?

Barney was not lazy, really; he simply liked to do the things

he liked to do—and disliked to do the things he disliked to do. So he looked upon his parents as pushing and penurious; and made up his mind that he was a much abused youngster. Also, he resolved that he detested home and school, that he desired, above all things, to have an abundance of money to spend—without the inconvenience of earning it, and that at no distant day he meant to run away from home, conquer the world for himself and enjoy it to the utmost. Alas, poor self-deceived urchin!

Still, with all his vain longings and imaginary troubles, Barney was measurably happy; but he didn't realize it. He had a saving sense of humor that kept him from becoming a morose and sullen pest; and, in spite of an occasional cloud upon his sunny face, he was the light of the household.

When alone at work or play, he was in the habit of thus talking to himself:

"Never mind! I'm going to be rich some day—and have just everything I want, and do just as I please. I'm going to live in a city, too—all the rich people live in the cities. And they don't have to work and do the things they don't like to do; they know just how to get lots of money without working for it. I don't want to be rich with houses and stores and things; it would be too much bother to look after them. I just want money—lots of money—as much as ten thousand dollars." Ten thousand dollars to Barney

meant an inexhaustible amount. "Or I'd just rather have money in my pocket all the time—no matter how much I'd spend, still have money in my pocket. My, wouldn't that be nice! Oh, I wish I could be fixed that way!"

One June day, at dinner time, his father said to him:

"Barney, did you weed out the onion-beds in the garden this forenoon?"

"No," Barney admitted rather reluctantly.

"Why didn't you?" Mr. Bylow asked sharply.

"Why—why," Barney stammered, "I—I was helping mother with the washing and churning."

In fact he had forgotten all about the task his father set him before going to the hayfield that morning.

"You haven't been busy all the time, helping your mother," Mr. Bylow said sternly; "you've been idling away your time. Now, I'm going to set you another task for this afternoon. I've mowed the small meadow lot over next to the big woods this forenoon; and you can go over there and rake up the hay. If you work as you ought, you can have it all raked up by three o'clock. At that time I'll come with the team and wagon; and we'll haul it in to the barn. If you don't get it done, I'll have to punish you; you've worn out my patience."

It was a sad and subdued Barney that left the barnyard a few

minutes later and trudged off to the hay lot, a rake upon his shoulder, and his red lips puckered into a pout of discontent. However, it was not in the cheerful nature of the lad to be downcast for long; and soon the ugly scowl upon his face had melted away in drops of sweat, and his pursed lips were emitting a merry whistle.

On reaching the hay lot, he went to work sturdily and resolutely; and was agreeably surprised to find that it was rather good fun to rake the dry and fragrant hay and toss it into billowy windrows. For an hour he worked steadily; and realized that what his father had told him was true: that he could be done by mid-afternoon. Thereupon he resolved that no punishment should be his—that his father should have cause for praise rather than blame; and he worked harder than ever. But the fates were against him and his good resolves, apparently. The sun beamed down from a cloudless sky; not a breath of air stirred. The sweat trickled down Barney's face and smarted his eyes, and his temples throbbed, but he worked away stoically. His tongue became dry and his throat parched; but he kept on. Finally, however, he yielded to heat and thirst, and threw down his rake and sought the little brook that gurgled and sparkled in the cool depths of the woodland near at hand.

Then, indeed, his troubles began. While he was slaking his thirst and laving his burning face and hands, a crow came and

perched upon the dead limb of a tree near him, and flapped its wings, and cawed stridently and impudently, cocking its head and peering down at him. Barney could not stand that. What self-respecting boy could? He caught up a club and hurled it at the saucy bird; but the black offender nimbly dodged the well-aimed missile, and bobbed and cawed and flapped delightedly. That was too much; Barney grew angry at such rank impertinence. He gathered a handful of stones and began a mad fusillade upon his tormentor — for such he deemed the bird. The crow dodged and danced about upon the limb, raising a great hubbub with its cawings and guttural chucklings. It appeared to take a human delight in defying the

lad; and—as Barney imagined—wore a look of human intelligence upon its expressive countenance. At last it tired of the sport, seemingly, and took slow-winged flight through the woods; and Barney noted that it had a narrow strip of white feathers down the middle of its back, reaching to the end of its tail.

"That's an odd-looking crow," he muttered, fanning his flushed face with his torn straw hat, "and a funny-acting one. I'll know it, if I ever see it again."

On his return to the hay lot, he vigorously resumed work; but had gathered but a few rakefuls when he came upon a bumblebees' nest. Of course he could have worked around the home of the bold and busy honey-makers, leaving ungathered the wisp of hay sheltering them; but that would have been contrary to the nature of a daring, fun-loving youngster like Barney. He promptly stirred them up—and was as promptly chased across the lot and into the woods, receiving more than one sharp prod to spur his flight.

Then he was hot figuratively and literally; and must make another pilgrimage to the brook. There he again encountered the pestiferous "white-feather crow," as already he called it, and a second time put it to flight—after a deal of wasted energy on his part, and a deal of hoarse croaking and cawing on the part of the crow.

Then, weary from the heat and his recent exertions—and feeling a faint drowsiness stealing over him, he dropped down upon

and Barney Bylow

the mossy sod at the root of the tree, sleepily pillowed his head upon his arm, numbly placed his hat to shield his face from the attacks of buzzing insects—and immediately lost consciousness.

Chapter II

BARNEY sat up with a sudden jerk, and rubbed his blinking eyes and gazed about him in a half-stupid, half-startled manner.

"Why—why, I thought I heard some boy laughing, and calling my name," he muttered. "Oh, I wonder how long I've slept! Maybe father's come!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed a cracked, hoarse voice over his head. The boy sprang to his feet, ran from under the spreading branches of the tree, and directed his gaze upward. There upon the dead limb sat the white-feather crow—actually nodding and bowing to him.

"Oh, it's you, is it!" Barney muttered in a tone of disgust. "Well, I haven't time to bother with you now, old White Feather; I must get back to work. I wonder, though, what you hang around me for?"

"Haw, haw, haw!" the crow laughed again, cocking its head and winking—as Barney would have sworn. "Haw, haw, haw! Bawrney Bylaw!"

"Why—why, it's saying my name!" the lad exclaimed, taking a step backward in amazement and mild affright.

and Barney Bylow

"Well, if that don't beat all!"

The crow fluttered its feathers, cawed and bobbed—then turned upon the limb and took flight into the further depths of the wood.

Barney returned to the hay lot, puzzled—and wondering deeply. The hay was not more than half raked; and the sun—as he noted with a sickening sense of dread—was far down the western arc of the heavens.

"Pshaw!" he grumbled, a scowl wrinkling his freckled face. "I slept too long; it must be time, almost, for father to come. I can't get it all raked now. I wonder what made me go to sleep—what made me so sleepy? There's no use to work any more; I can't get it all done—and father'll punish me, sure."

Then, after a moment's moody silence:

"That old White Feather's to blame. And I never saw such a funny crow. I know I heard it laugh; and I think it called my name."

Then suddenly he hollowed his hand and put it to his ear. A faint rumbling, rattling sound came from far across the fields. The boy listened intently. The sound drew nearer—grew louder and more distinct every moment.

"That's father coming with the team and wagon!" Barney whispered, his heart beating a tattoo against his ribs.

"Now I'll catch it! For father never breaks his word. And

—and I suppose I ought to be scolded, at least; I could have had the job done."

Then, with quick resolve and tightening of the lips:

"But I won't stay and be punished—I won't! I've meant to run away for a long while; I'll go now—this very minute."

Immediately he put his resolve into action. Over the rail fence he scrambled, and skurried away in the direction of the distant highway—as fast as his bare, brown legs could carry him. Occasionally he slackened his speed and cast a quick glance over his shoulder, to note if his father was in sight; and each time he drew a deep breath of relief that his flight was not observed, and ran on, panting.

On reaching the highroad, he dropped down in a shady fence corner and lay there, gasping and listening. The hay lot was hid from sight by an intervening elevation of ground, but there were no signs or sounds of pursuit. No one was following him—no one was calling him; and he began to breathe easier—the tumultuous throbbing of his heart began to quiet down.

At last he arose and took a long look around at the familiar fields, fences and woods. To the west, just over the green knoll of the pasture field, was the hay lot he had left so hurriedly. His father must be there—wondering what had become of his recreant son. To the south lay home—the roofs of house and barn barely

visible above the intervening orchard trees. There was his mother. Barney knew that she would worry over his absence, that many sleepless nights would be hers. He realized fully that what he contemplated would grieve his parents; but he choked down the lump in his throat, set his teeth, and determined to carry out his rash resolve.

Up the dusty country road he plodded. Far away to the north, lying like a dark cloud bank against the distant sky-line, he could discern the smoke overhanging the city toward which he was bound—which he had visited but a few times in his life. On and on he went. The sun sank lower and lower, until it was but an hour above the horizon. Barney was weary and hungry. He stopped and took a drink at a wayside spring, and dropped down upon a mossy stone to rest.

Witch Crow

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Well, I declare!" ejaculated Barney, springing to his feet. "If there isn't old White Feather!"

Sure enough, there was the white-feather crow perched upon a near-by fence stake.

"It appears I'm going to have company upon my journey," Barney laughed.

Really he was quite pleased that the peculiar crow had seen fit to follow him. The lad was just a trifle homesick already, though he had got but a few miles from home. The declining sun had set him to thinking fondly of all he had left behind.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed White Feather. "Bawrney Bylaw!" Bawrney Bylaw!"

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Barney, moving toward the stake on which the bird was perched.

But the saucy crow did not await his near approach. While he was yet some yards distant, it arose and flapped leisurely to another post farther up the road, cawing and haw-hawing as it went. Barney followed; and again the wary fowl took wing at his approach and moved on to another perch—reaching which, it bobbed and chuckled and winked impertinently.

Barney was disgusted, and cried out peevishly: "You're a cow-

ard, old White Feather! If you want to say anything to me, why don't you stop and meet me face to face—and say it!"

The crow drew itself erect, fluttered its feathers, and—Barney would have sworn to the startling fact—smiled and nodded at its challenger. Then it flapped to the ground at the boy's feet; and instantly it had disappeared, and a little old woman dressed all in black was there in the bird's stead.

Barney started back, rubbed his wondering eyes, muttered—"Why—what—what—"; and could say no more.

The little old woman stood bobbing and curtseying and preening herself—just like an overgrown crow. Her face was thin, wrinkled and dark; and her eyes were small, black and snappy. Upon her head she wore a curious hood or bonnet of ebony hue, quite pointed in front; and draped and drawn closely around her shoulders and neck, wholly concealing her arms and hands, she wore a cloak of the same sable color as her hood. It reached the ground in a point behind, and had a narrow white stripe down the middle. Her dark skirt was short and scant; and her slim ankles and small feet were encased in shiny black shoes.

"Who—who, what—what are you?" Barney managed to say.

The little old woman laughed a harsh, cackling laugh, and walked up and down in front of the lad, bobbing and teetering as a crow does.

Finally she made answer to his question:

"You want to know who I am?"

Her voice was hoarse and grating.

"Y-e-s," Barney stammered.

He had not yet fully recovered from the tremor of surprise and fear into which her sudden appearance had thrown him.

"And you want to know *what* I am?" she went on, comically cocking her head and grinning.

"Yes," he answered.

He was rapidly regaining his composure.

"And you desire me to tell you who *you* are?" she continued.

"You can't tell me who *I* am—you don't know me," he replied positively.

"Don't I?" she laughed, opening wide her toothless mouth and revealing her shrunken gums. "Listen!—

"Now, I know you
And you know me—
And that's as plain
As plain can be—
For I'm the jolly Witch-Crow;
And you know me
And I know you,

The Little Old Woman Walked Up and Down Bobbing and Teetering.

And so I say:
How do you do—
How are you, Barney Bylow?"

Then she laughed again heartily; and Barney stood and stared at her.

"How do you like my poetry?" she asked.

"It isn't poetry," the boy replied sturdily but ungallantly; "it's what my teacher calls doggerel."

"No, it isn't!" she disputed, bringing her lips shut with a snap. "Dogs compose doggerel; crows compose crowerel!"

And once more she laughed that hoarse, rasping laugh.

"Oh, do stop!" cried Barney, his palms to his ears. "You set my teeth on edge."

"You don't set mine on edge," she chuckled, opening wide her toothless jaws.

Barney's fear had vanished.

"Are you a crow?" he demanded.

"I'm the Witch-Crow, or the Crow-Witch," she made answer.

"Which?" he asked.

"Yes, witch," she returned.

And amused at her play upon the words, she laughed and bobbed and shrugged her shoulders until she choked, lost her breath and balance—and almost tumbled over in the dust of the road.

Witch Crow

"Now, what are you—crow or witch?" Barney insisted when she had recovered from her fit of merriment.

"Either, neither, and both," she replied.

"How can that be?"

"Well, when I'm a crow, I'm a crow, eh?"

"Yes."

"And when I'm a witch, I'm a witch?"

"Of course."

"Then, you see, I'm either."

"I see."

"And when I'm the Witch-Crow, I'm not a witch—not a crow; I'm neither."

"To be sure."

"And, yet, being the Witch-Crow, I'm both. Understand?"

"No, I don't," Barney said flatly.

"Well, you're not versed in witch-lore, and I'll excuse you. Now let's talk about yourself. So you're running away from home, eh?"

Barney nodded.

"And you haven't a dollar—a cent, even—in your pocket."

"How do you know?" the boy asked quickly.

"Well, I know!"—her face close to his, and her black eyes sparkling.

"You haven't any money—now, have you?"

"No," he confessed.

"Why don't you say 'no, ma'am' ?" she croaked irritably.

"Why—why, I—I—" Barney explained lamely and haltingly, "I don't know whether a witch, or a witch-crow, or whatever you call yourself, is a ma'am."

"Oh, you don't!" laughed the Witch-Crow. "Well, I am a ma'am. But let it go. I'll tell you what you may call me: you may call me White Feather—not Old White Feather, mind you, as you called me when you thought me just a crow. That's disrespectful. And now let's get back to your business—for I must be off about my own. You'd like to be rich, wouldn't you?"

"I—I'd like to have money," Barney admitted.

"Lots of it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"But you don't want to work for it."

"No-o—no, ma'am," he replied, half ashamed.

"How much money would you like to have?"

"Oh, as much as—as a whole heap—as much as ten thousand dollars; or—or—"

"Well?" White Feather croaked impatiently.

"Or I'd rather just have money in my pocket all the time—never be without it, no matter how much I might spend," Barney hastened to explain.

"That arrangement would suit you better than to have ten thousand dollars in a lump?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Nothing else would satisfy you so well?" the Witch-Crow persisted.

Barney shook his head.

"Very well," she said; "so it shall be. But you mustn't grow tired of your bargain."

"I'm not likely to grow tired of having money to spend—and spending it."

And Barney laughed at the bare idea.

White Feather thrust forth a skinny, claw-like hand, from the folds of her black cloak. In her palm was a single penny.

"Listen!" she said huskily.

" 'Tis money you crave!
This penny I bless;
You'll never have more—
And you'll never have less!"

With the words she dropped the coin into the boy's gaping pocket. He started back, dismay upon his face.

"You—you don't mean to say that I'll never have more than a penny, do you?" he cried falteringly.

"That's just what I mean to say—and do say," the Witch-Crow laughed, hugging herself and weaving to and fro. "You'll never have more than a penny; but, then, you'll never have less—you must remember."

"But that doesn't suit me at all," Barney pouted.

"It's what you asked for."

Barney dejectedly shook his head.

"Yes, it's what you asked for," White Feather insisted. "You said you wished to have money in your pocket all the time, no matter how much you might spend. Well, you can't spend more than you have. I've given you what you said you desired above all things. But I must leave you to work out the puzzle for yourself. Good-bye."

Instantly she was gone. Barney stood alone in the dusty high-road; and the white-feather crow was winging its way toward a distant wood.

Chapter III

BARNEY watched the marvelous crow until it disappeared among the forest trees. Then he pinched himself to see if he was awake, and was rather surprised to find that he was. Next he turned and looked at the declining sun. It was just sinking from sight behind the western hills, and long, lank shadows sprawled along the dusty road, misshapen and grotesque.

"I must be moving on," the lad murmured to himself, a catch in his voice.

"I—I almost wish I hadn't run away from home. I'm hungry and tired; but I don't know where I'm to find supper and bed. I can't go back, though; I can't—I won't!"

He set his teeth, squeezed back the tears that would come into his eyes, and resolutely set forward.

"This penny I bless;
You'll never have more—
And you'll never have less!"

He whispered the doggerel rhyme to himself as he wearily plodded along.

"Confound the old Witch-Crow!" he muttered angrily. "She was just fooling with me. The idea of giving me a rusty old penny, and saying I'd never have more and I'd never have less! Of course, she was just fooling—just teasing me—just making sport of me. Well, I'll show her whether I won't have less! I'll throw the hateful old penny away."

He took the paltry coin from his pocket and flung it far among the tall weeds of the roadside.

"There!" he said with a grin—for the moment forgetting that he was weary, hungry and homesick. "I've got less now, I guess. My! It's getting dusk. I must find something to eat, and a place to sleep."

He commenced to whistle, to keep up his spirits. Immediately he felt better; and threw back his head, jauntily cocked his hat over one eye, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and swaggered along—striving to make himself believe that he was very brave and cheerful.

But of a sudden he stopped stock still in his tracks and slowly withdrew his right hand from his pocket. Between thumb and finger he held another penny.

"Well, if that don't beat everything!" he gasped. "I thought I threw that penny away; I did throw it away, surely. Maybe I'm

mistaken, though; that old Witch-Crow has muddled me up so. Well, I'll throw it away this time, all right. There!"

He flung the coin into an adjoining field. Then, slowly and cautiously, he again explored the depths of his right hand pocket—and brought forth another penny.

"Gee!" he ejaculated explosively. "Well, I'll try it again. Here goes!"

The third coin quickly followed the second—scaring a quail from its nest and sending it whirring away in the gathering dusk.

"I've heard of fellows having money to throw at the birds," Barney giggled. "I guess I must be one of those chaps. Here's another penny—and there it goes; and here's another one—and there it goes. Every time I throw away one, there's another in my pocket—and always in the pocket the Witch-Crow dropped the first one into. Now I know what she meant by saying I'd never have less than a penny. But what did she mean by saying I'd never have more? I suppose she meant that just one penny at a time would come into my pocket. That's it. She couldn't mean anything else; because I might find money, or earn it. Then I'd have more than a penny, of course. What a silly joke to play on a fellow! Nobody but a witch would do such a thing. I never did take much stock in witches; and I don't take any now. Old White Feather! That's what I'll call her—the mean old thing; I don't care how

disrespectful it is. Just because I said I'd like always to have money in my pocket, no matter how much I might spend, she played this mean trick on me. But it's getting dark; I must hurry on and find supper and bed somewhere."

He meant to stop at the next farmhouse and ask for food and shelter; but the house and surroundings, in the gathering darkness, looked gloomy and uninviting. So he slipped past silently. From a wayside tree he procured a few ill-flavored apples, and munched them as he went along. At the next house he stopped and opened the gate leading into the yard. A great shaggy dog barked and growled threateningly at him. Barney shut the gate with a bang and hurried on. At the third place he tried, the farmer and his wife were noisily quarreling, and the children were crying. Barney listened a moment at the open door, then slipped away in the darkness. At last, worn out and thoroughly discouraged, he crept into a barn, climbed the ladder to the mow, and cuddled down in the sweet new hay. Quickly he fell into a deep sleep of utter exhaustion, his head upon his arm and his cheeks wet with tears.

In the after part of the night a storm came up. The lightning flashed wickedly; the thunder boomed and crashed; the rain fell in torrents. The uproar wakened Barney and frightened him, but he was so tired and sleepy that he immediately fell asleep again.

The sun was an hour high when Barney crept from his couch

and emerged from the barn. The landscape had had a refreshing bath, and looked green and beautiful, and the birds were singing and chirping cheerily. Barney's fears and homesickness had gone with the night, his courage had returned; but he was hungry—so hungry.

"I'm going to try at this house for something to eat," he communed with himself. "I'm almost famished."

He washed his hands and face in the cistern-trough at the corner of the barn, combed his tousled hair with his fingers, and stood thinking.

"What if they ask me to pay for my breakfast—what'll I do?" he thought. "Oh, I know! Every time I take a penny from my pocket, there was another one there, so I'll just count out a lot of them and have them ready."

He put his right hand into his pocket, brought out the penny he found there, and placed it in his left palm. Quickly he again sent his hand fishing for another coin; but it came forth empty.

"Why, there's no penny in my pocket this time!" he exclaimed aloud. "What does that mean? Oh, I see! 'You'll never have more'; and I'd be having more, if I had one in my hand and one in my pocket. Well, I'll lay this one on the curb of the cistern, and see how that'll work."

He did so, and found another penny in his pocket. He con-

tinued to extract them and lay them one by one on the cistern curb. When he had twenty or more, he said:

"That's enough to pay for a breakfast, I suppose. I'll put them in my left pocket, and have them ready."

He tried to gather up the row of coins; but the first he touched disappeared before his eyes—melted into thin air, as it seemed—and was gone.

"Well, I'll—be—doggoned!" Barney muttered under his breath.

He was perplexed—astounded. After momentary hesitation and thought, he tried again, and kept on trying. One by one the pennies as he touched them melted into nothingness.

"Pshaw!" he grumbled. "I don't like to have such a mean old witch-trick played on me. I wonder if it'll be the same with any other money I get—melt out of my fingers as soon as I touch it, like a snowflake. If that's the way the thing's going to do, I'll never have more than a penny, sure enough—no matter if I work my hands off; no matter if I inherit a fortune. I think it's mean—mean as dirt!"

Then, in spite of his irritation, he laughed.

"Gee! Wouldn't I make a great cashier in a bank? I'd break the concern in a week."

Sobering, he went on musingly: "But breakfast I must have, and right away; and I'm going to this house to get it. If they ask

me for pay, I'll have to give them a cent at a time. Maybe they'll think me crazy, and set the dog on me—I don't know."

He crossed the road to the farmhouse, went around to the kitchen, and timidly knocked upon the half-open door.

"Good mornin'," said the motherly woman who appeared in the doorway. "What are you doin' so far away from home so early in the mornin'?"

"How do you know I'm far away from home?" Barney returned, wondering how the woman guessed the truth so quickly and exactly.

"W'y," she answered, smiling, "that's easy enough. I know all the boys for several miles around, and you don't belong in this neighborhood. You slept in our barn-mow last night, didn't you?"

"Y-e-s," the boy admitted, still more surprised. "But how did you know that?"

The woman laughed good-naturedly.

"There's hayseed upon your clothes," she said; "then I saw you washin' at the cistern-trough. You've run away from home, too; nobody would be away from home, dressed as you are, unless he'd run away. And you didn't have any supper—you look hollow and weak—and you want your breakfast."

"That's what I do!" Barney assented heartily.

Again the woman laughed; and the boy smiled in sympathy.

and Barney Bylow

"Well, we had breakfast by lamp-light," she went on; "the men folks have been off to the fields an hour or more. I can't stop my work to get you a warm meal—you ought to have got up sooner; but I can give you a bowl of bread and milk."

"Oh, anything—just anything'll do!" Barney hastened to say. And he meant it; he felt that he was famishing.

The woman set her arms akimbo and looked at the lad keenly. Once more she laughed, her fat sides shaking.

"You're not half as high-and-mighty about your breakfast this mornin'," she remarked, "as you were about your meals at home; you're eatin' humble pie. Well, it'll

do you good; you'll know more of the world and its ways by the time you get ready to go back to your father and mother. Will you come into the kitchen to eat your bread and milk, or shall I bring it out to you?"

"I'll sit here on the step, if you please," Barney made reply. The woman brought out a large bowl of bread and milk, and returned to her duties indoors. The boy silently ate his repast. Then he arose and presented himself at the door, with spoon and empty bowl.

"Will you have some more?" the woman inquired, taking the articles from his hands.

"No, thank you, ma'am," he replied. "I've had plenty; and I'm much obliged."

"That's all right," smiled the woman. "Now let me give you a little advice, to help digest your breakfast: you'd better turn right around and go back to your parents."

Barney shook his head.

"Yes, you had," the woman insisted. "You haven't hardly any clothes—and no money, of course; and you won't find everybody as obligin' as I've been. You'd better go back home. What are you going to do without money? You—"

"But I've got money," Barney interrupted her. "I can pay you for my breakfast, if you want me to."

"You've got money?" the woman cried sharply, a ring of suspicion in her voice. "Where did you get it? Let me see how much you have."

Barney drew a penny from his pocket and held it up between thumb and finger.

"Is that all you have?" she asked.

"Yes—no," Barney stammered, "that is—I--I—"

"Well, speak out, and tell the truth," she commanded.

"I—I don't know whether it's all I've got, or not."

"You don't know?"—in evident perplexity.

"No, I don't," he replied. "I know it's all I've got now; but you take this penny, and maybe I'll find another one in my pocket."

"W'y—w'y, I can't understand what you mean," she exclaimed, completely mystified.

But she took the coin, and the boy immediately brought forth another and placed it in her outstretched palm—and another, and another.

"Why don't you hand them all out at once?" she asked, puzzled and irritated.

"Because there's only one at a time in my pocket."

"Only one at a time in your pocket!" she gasped in amazement. "What do you mean? Explain yourself."

"I can't explain," Barney pouted. "I don't understand the

thing myself. There's never more than one penny at a time in my pocket; when I take that out, there's another one there. An old crow, or witch, or crow-witch, or witch-crow—or something of the kind, blessed a penny, or cursed it—or something like that—and gave it to me; and now I can never have more than a penny, and I can never have less. You keep what I've given you; for if I take them they'll all melt away to nothing."

The woman stood and stared—first at the boy, then at the money in her hand. After a little, she smiled pityingly and said:

"You poor boy! I don't know what ails you; but you're awfully wrong in your head some way—talking about crows and witches, and blessin's and curses. Come in here, and lie down and rest. I'll keep you here till the men folks come to dinner. Then we'll send you back to your people, if we can find them; if not, we'll send you to an asylum, to get well. Come on in. But what's your name? You'd better tell me right now, before you forget it; folks goin' crazy are liable to forget their names. What is yours?"

Barney began to back off, without making answer, a startled expression upon his freckled face, and fear quickening his pulses.

"Here—none of that!" the woman cried, making a grab at him.

But he nimbly eluded her grasp, dodged around the corner of the house, and was off like a shot up the hot highway. And he did not pause to draw breath until he was several hundred yards from the premises.

"I'll bet I don't try to make any more explanations," he mused as he journeyed onward. "That woman thought me crazy; and that's what anybody else would think. My! but I had a narrow escape!"

Just before noon he came to the summit of a high ridge overlooking a broad river valley; and there at his feet, it appeared, lay the city he sought.

Chapter IV

BARNEY descended to the valley; and was in the suburbs of the city. Along the residence streets he sauntered, admiring the beautiful flower-beds and velvety lawns, and marveling at the palatial residences. He was hungry; but he could not summon up courage to call at any of the fine houses and ask for food. Sidewalks and pavements were hot to his bruised and tired feet, and soon he found himself picking his way from one shady spot to another, and limping painfully. At last he seated himself upon a bench in a little park and drowsed and nodded—lulled by the tinkle of a sparkling fountain near at hand.

It was mid-afternoon when he finally roused himself and again set off toward the heart of the city. He had no well-defined purpose in mind. He was an alien in an alien land, and he had no idea what he was going to do, or what was to become of him.

An hour's steady walking brought him into the business section of the great town. Trolley cars were whizzing and buzzing along their shining tracks; vans, cabs and all sorts of lighter vehicles were rumbling and jolting over the cobble-stones. A steady stream of people was flowing along the sidewalks and trickling in and out

of the big buildings; and everything was hustle and bustle, and hurry and flurry. The crowd seemed mad with desire to go somewhere or to do something, but Barney could not make out what it was all about. At any rate, he decided the excitement was not occasioned by his advent, for no one gave him the least attention.

He had been in the city two or three times before, and now he recognized a few familiar landmarks. But all the rest was confusion—chaos absolute—and the country lad felt that he was an intruder in the stirring hive, and the thought overwhelmed him with sickening fear and dread.

He sought to get away from the rush and clamor. Down a side street he went, on and on, out of the congested quarter. When he had escaped from the mad whirlpool and was in quieter waters, figuratively speaking, he felt more sane, and his courage in a measure returned.

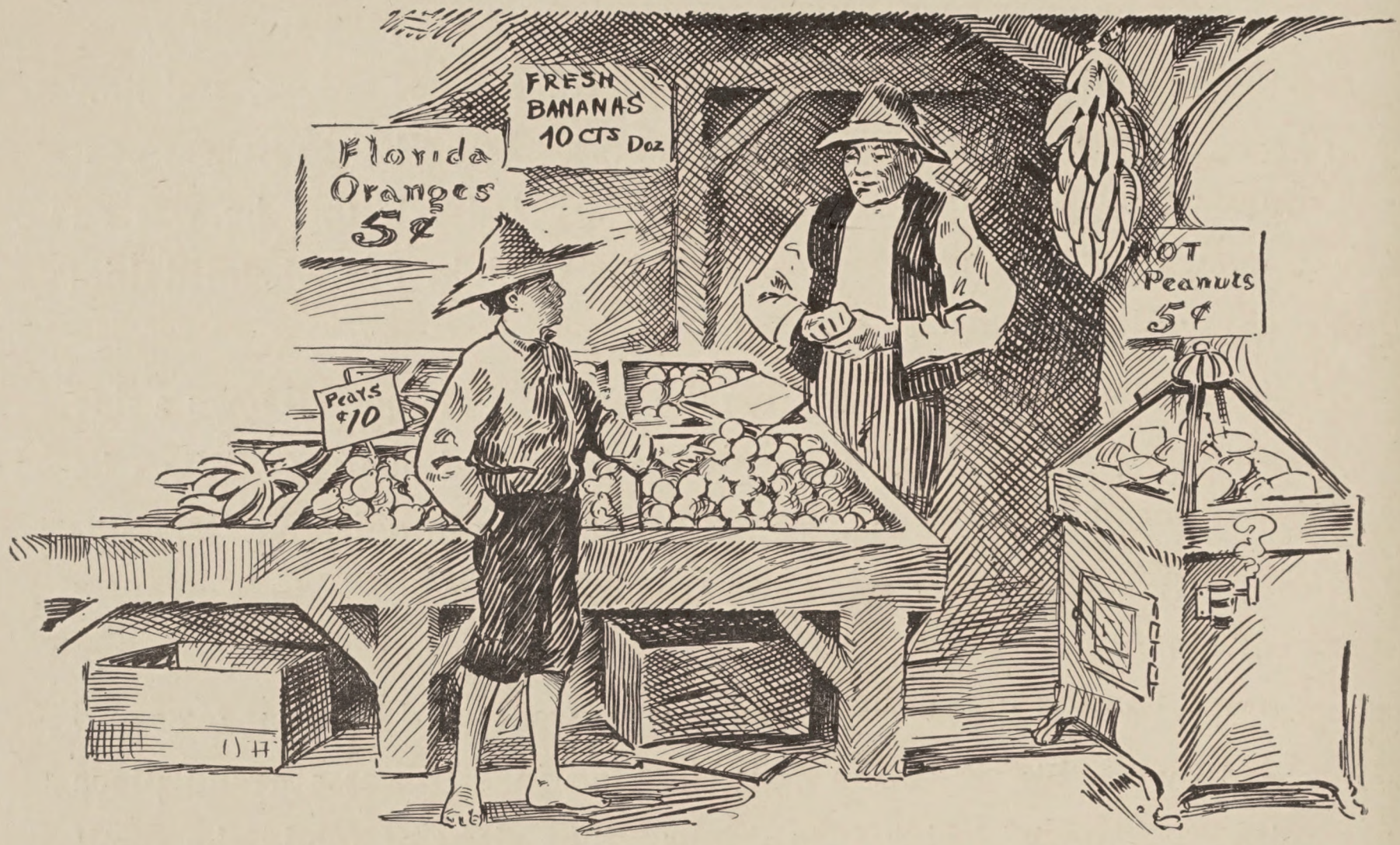
Just across the street he saw a restaurant; and he went over and stood in front of the open door, looking in. It was a grand place with tile floor and rich furnishings. The sight of food—the smell of it—tantalized the boy, but he ruefully regarded his bare, brown feet and soiled, countrified clothes and moved slowly away.

On the next corner was a fruit-stand; and there he stopped.

"How—how much are those oranges?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Five-a cent-a," the Italian replied, smiling and rubbing his hands.

"I'll take one," said Barney, and he counted out five pennies, one at a time.



"You give-a penny one-a time," the fruit vender laughed; "you no like-a let-a loose money. What-a more?"

"How much are those bananas?"

"Five-a cent-a."

"Apiece?" Barney inquired, his native shrewdness prompting the question.

"No—no!" the Italian hastened to say. "Five-a cent-a two."

The swarthy-skinned fellow was afraid he was going to miss a sale.

Barney decided to take two, and again laid out five pennies.

"You got-a heap-a penny," the foreigner chuckled; "maybe you rob-a de bank."

Barney did not appreciate the man's sally of wit; and silently moved away, peeling and eating his fruit as he went. All the afternoon he sauntered about, from one street to another, regaling himself with sweetmeats—and drenching his stomach with soda-water and ginger-beer. When he was full to repletion, he dropped down upon the steps of a public building, heaved a deep sigh of weariness —if not of complete satisfaction and content—and murmured:

"Well, this isn't so bad, after all. I've got money to buy some of the things I've always wanted, anyhow. I guess I can't make much complaint against old White Feather. I don't need any supper, that's sure; I'm full and running over. My! haven't I eaten a lot of stuff! I wonder if it'll make me sick. But I ought to have a place to sleep. Of course it's warm enough to lie out-doors; but I don't like to do it. I can't, in this big place—I'm afraid! I'll have to try some of the hotels; I don't know where else to go. But I don't suppose they'll take me in; I've heard father say they won't keep anybody that hasn't baggage of some kind. And I haven't

any duds on my back, hardly, let alone having a trunk or valise. I don't know what to do."

Elbows upon knees and chin in palms, he sat meditating. People passed to and fro on the sidewalk and up and down the stone steps on which the puzzled urchin sat; but they gave him no attention, and he was barely aware of their presence. He was thinking of many things—but of home, principally.

A stylishly dressed young lady in a pony phaeton drew up to the curb. Barney roused himself and observed her. She sprang nimbly to the ground and tripped across the sidewalk to the steps. But the ponies began to stamp and paw restlessly, and she paused. Turning to Barney and smiling sweetly, she said:

"Will you mind them for me? I'll be gone but a few minutes."

"Yes, ma'am," Barney replied, rising with what alacrity his full stomach and stiffened limbs would permit, and moving to the ponies' heads.

True to her promise, the young lady was gone but a short time. On her return she thanked the lad and proffered him a quarter.

"I—I don't want to take it," he murmured, thrown into confusion by her gracious manner and winsome smile.

"What—you don't want to take it?" she laughed. "You don't belong in the city, then."

"No, ma'am; I'm from the country."

"I thought so," she smiled. "Well, take the money; you've earned it."

Barney, rather reluctantly, for he felt it was too much for so small a service, put out his hand to receive the coin, but no sooner did it touch his fingers than it disappeared.

The boy stood stupidly staring at his calloused palm, and the young lady stood staring at the boy.

"Did you drop it?" she asked.

Barney continued to stare blankly at his hand, and made no reply.

"Did you drop the money—the quarter?" she repeated, touching his arm to rouse him.

"No, I—I don't think I did," he blundered.

"You don't think you did?"—In evident surprise and wonderment.—"Don't you know whether you dropped it?"

"No, I don't!!" Barney muttered sullenly.

"If you didn't drop it, what became of it?"

"I don't know."

"Look here!" she cried, giving him a little shake. "You're not a stupid boy—a dunce. If you didn't drop that quarter I gave you, where is it? Are you trying to play a trick upon me—to get me to give you another?"

"No, I'm not!" Barney answered indignantly, looking her squarely in the face.

The young lady silently searched his countenance for a few moments, then she remarked:

"Well, it's very strange—very strange, indeed. I believe you're honest—I believe you're telling me the truth. You must have dropped the coin. It didn't fall into your pocket, or lodge in the folds of your clothing?"

Barney shook his head, with difficulty repressing a smile at her earnest perplexity.

"Then it's on the ground," she said. "Let's look for it."

She began to move about, slightly stooping and scanning the pavement at her feet. Barney joined her in the hunt, though he felt it was useless. The coin was not to be found.

"Well," she murmured at last, giving up the search, "it's only a quarter—and I don't care for the money; but I would like to know where it went."

"So would I!" Barney whispered under his breath.

"However," the young lady continued, thrusting her gloved fingers into her purse, "here's another quarter for you."

"I won't take it." the boy said sturdily.

"You won't?"—in complete astonishment.

"No, ma'am, I won't."

"Why?" she inquired.

Barney was silent.

"Why won't you take it—because I questioned your honesty? Is that it?"

Barney shook his head.

"Well, you're an odd boy, and an honest one; I know it now. But tell me why you won't take this quarter. Why won't you?"

"You've paid me once—that's reason enough," Barney answered.

"But you haven't got the quarter I gave you, so it can do you no good."

"Neither would this one do me any good," Barney replied dejectedly.

"Would you lose it, too?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Do you lose all the money you get?" she inquired with keen interest.

"I—I guess I lose it; something becomes of it, anyhow—most of it."

"That's odd, and you're odd," she said musingly, looking him over. "But I must be going. You're a stranger in a big city, and you may have a hard time to make your way. Here's my card. If the time ever comes that I can help you in any way, let me know. You'll find work, if you hunt for it, and you'll succeed,

if you deserve to. Treasure as precious the native honesty that is yours. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," he returned, absent-mindedly dropping the bit of pasteboard into his pocket.

The young lady climbed into her conveyance and drove away, nodding and smiling over her shoulder as she went, and Barney sauntered from the spot, muttering disconsolately:

"That settles it! Old White Feather has fixed me, sure. I thought maybe other money would stick to my fingers; but I'm never to have more than a penny—that's plain. And the young lady thought me so honest; and I didn't dare to explain. I'm in a pretty fix! What am I to do?"

He tramped the streets until far into the night, wretched and forlorn, and wishing sincerely that he was back at home. Night and loneliness are conducive to homesickness and horrors, as light and company are conducive to carelessness and courage; and Barney was more lonely in the crowded mart than he would have been in the trackless woods. He was afraid to ask for lodging, yet afraid to sleep out-of-doors. So he tramped and tramped until almost exhausted, occasionally stopping to gaze into a store window or to snatch a few minutes' rest upon a convenient curb or dark stairway.

It was nearing midnight. The streets were practically de-

serted; all places of business, excepting hotels and saloons, were closed. The trolley cars stopped running. The lonesome screech of an incoming or outgoing train echoed weirdly; all other of the clamorous sounds of day were hushed. Barney grew terrorized—he could stand the darkness and loneliness no longer. His lesser fears yielded to his greater, and he entered the open door of a great hotel, and stood blinking in the welcome light.

Several well-dressed men were sitting in the hotel lobby, smoking and chatting, and they looked up at the boy's entrance. The night porter came forward and gruffly demanded:

"What do you want in here, youngster?"

"I want to—to get a—a room and bed," Barney replied faintly, trembling so that he could hardly speak.

The men winked at one another and smiled.

"A room and bed?" the porter gasped, astounded.

"Y-e-s—yes, sir," Barney answered.

"Holee smoke!" ejaculated the porter.

Then he guffawed; and the guests of the hostelry joined him. Barney stood embarrassed, twirling his disreputable straw hat in his hands—and undecided whether to stand his ground or turn and flee into the night.

Attracted by the outburst of merriment, several more men drifted into the lobby from the bar in the rear, and the night clerk

came forward. He was a sallow, skinny man with sickly mustache and weakly voice.

"What's the joke, fellows?" he squeaked. "Tell me; I want to laugh, too."

"Why," the porter explained facetiously, "this is Lord Algernon Frecklemug of Punkintown; and he wants a suite of rooms and a bath."

Then all laughed and slapped their thighs, and began to crowd around the lad, to have further sport at his expense. Barney's nature was simplicity itself; but instantly he understood their designs, and his Irish-American blood began to simmer.

"You needn't think yourselves so smart!" he cried hotly, his small fists clenched hard, his face crimson, and tears in his eyes. "I haven't done any of you any harm. I just came in here and asked for a place to sleep, because I didn't know where else to go or what else to do. I expected to be ordered out; but I didn't expect gentlemen to make fun of me. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves; you were boys once, and—and—"

His voice quavered and broke and his features twitched; but he still stood defiantly erect, his moist eyes flashing.

The weakly-voiced clerk giggled a signal for another outburst of merriment, but somehow it didn't come. One or two men chuckled half apologetically and a few smiled half sympathetically, but

nobody laughed. Then a broad-shouldered young man with straight, muscular limbs stepped to Barney's side and kindly laid a hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"I'm on the side of the boy," he said quietly; "it is a dirty shame to make fun of him. If you fellows desire to make sport of anyone, try it on me for taking up his defense. I'll do my best to make it interesting for you. This boy came in here hunting a place to sleep. He's a stranger to city ways—that's plain to be seen; and he came here because he didn't know where else to go —because he was frightened at the loneliness and darkness of the streets. He made his request like a little man; he wasn't saucy —he didn't get gay. And it *is* ungentlemanly to make sport of him. That's all I have to say; and any of you can take exceptions to my words, if you care to.

No one breathed a syllable in reply, but all looked very solemn, and a few frankly ashamed.

The young man turned to the clerk and said:

"Give this little chap a bed, and I'll pay for it."

"I can't do that, you know," the clerk objected, assuming a boldness and firmness he did not at all feel in the presence of the athletic young man; "it's contrary to the rules of the house."

"Of course I wouldn't have you break any of the rules of this blessed caravansary," the young athlete returned, his lip slightly

curled. "But this boy came up from the country, as I did; he's homesick and wretched, as I was; he can't find a place to stay, as I couldn't. Ten years from now, though, he'll be traveling for some big firm—more than likely—and then you'll break your neck in an effort to please him—to get him to stop with you. It's the way of the world. Well, if you won't let him stay here, tell me a place where I can send him."

"He might try the Arcade," the clerk replied humbly; "it's a kind of general lodging-house."

"Where is it?" the young man inquired briskly, consulting his watch.

"Three squares north, and two east."

"You hear that?" the young man said, turning to Barney. "Here! Take this dollar and run over there. I'd go with you and see that you get in, but my train's almost due—and I must be off to the station. Take this and skedaddle."

But Barney shook his head and sidled toward the door.

"Won't you take it?" urged the young man.

"No, sir," the boy answered, edging farther toward the open air.

"Why?" the young man pursued.

Barney made no reply but kept up his retreat toward the open door.

The young man stopped following the lad, and said with a smile:

"You're too independent to accept what you haven't earned, eh? Well, so was I." This was touching Barney in a tender spot, and he winced. Had he not come to the city to get money without earning it? "But I must grab my grips and be off. Keep a stiff upper lip, no matter what happens. Good luck to you—and so long."

The young man man whirled and strode toward the rear of the lobby, and Barney slouched out into the night again. And as he went slinking along the walls of the tall buildings and gazing fearsomely into the enveloping gloom, he murmured brokenly, a sob in his throat:

"He thought me honest—that I wouldn't take the dollar because I hadn't earned it—that's what hurts. And *she* thought me honest."—meaning the young lady who had proffered him a second quarter. "Oh, I'm so miserable I almost wish I was dead!"

"Here!" said a gruff voice in the boy's ear, startling him and rudely rousing him from his introspection. "What are you doing on the streets this time of night?"

And a big policeman emerged from the shadows and took him by the arm.

"I'm on the streets because I've no place else to go," Barney answered truthfully. He had a wholesome respect for the authority invested in a police uniform.

"In that case," remarked the officer, taking a square look at the boy, "I'll have to escort you down to the city prison and hand you over to the matron. You'll be sure of bed and breakfast there. Come along."

"Oh, please—please don't!" Barney pleaded, terrorized at the bare thought of going to prison. "If you lock me up, I'll just die!"

The big, red-faced policeman laughed, but it was a kindly laugh. Then he said:

"You must get off the streets, then, if I don't run you in."

"I will—I will!" Barney promised with alacrity.

The big policeman released him, and he sped around the corner, into an alley. There he found himself in front of the open door of a livery-barn, and he sneaked in unobserved and tumbled down upon a pile of straw in a vacant stall.

And in his troubled sleep he muttered:

"Yes—yes! I'll get off the streets! Don't lock me up—please don't! I'll get off—off—off the *earth,* if you want me to!"

Chapter V

BARNEY left the livery-barn quite early next morning—urgently propelled by a hostler with a piece of strap in his hand. Heavy-eyed and but half awake, the lad hardly realized what was happening till he was out in the alley and alone. Then

of a sudden he became conscious of the smarts occasioned by the playing of the strap about his bare legs, and he stooped and feelingly rubbed his injured members.

"There's lots of mean people in a city, I guess," he grumbled, fetching a yawn and shivering as the damp of the gray morning penetrated his scant attire. "What was the use of that fellow using a strap on me? I wasn't hurting anything, sleeping on that bundle of straw. It seems that I'm going to have a tough time of it, sure enough."

He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and sauntered out upon the street. Few people were abroad, but the trolley cars were running, factory whistles were screeching—the hive of industry was beginning to buzz. Barney again shivered, hunched his shoulders and went pattering along the thoroughfare, no destination in mind, no object in view. His limbs were stiff and sore; his feet were tender; every muscle in his body ached. His stomach was afflicted with a gnawing emptiness, but the thought of sweetmeats was nauseating.

"I need a warm breakfast," he determined; "I haven't had anything warm to eat since I left home. But how am I going to get it? Well, I'll have to depend upon myself, I reckon; nobody else'll help me, that's sure. I'll just have to make the best of my one-

sided bargain with old White Feather; but it looks to me like it was going to be a mighty poor best."

His aimless footsteps brought him to a cheap restaurant with an obscure, narrow entrance. He stooped and peeped into the dusky interior. A rough-looking man jostled past him, strode through the doorway, and seated himself at one of the small tables. Barney quickly and quietly followed the man and took a seat at the same table.

A waiter came forward to take their orders.

"What will you have this morning, Mr. Gross?" he asked, addressing the man at the table.

"Hot rolls, fried potatoes, and a cup of coffee," Mr. Gross replied.

"I'll take the same," Barney volunteered.

"This boy with you, Mr. Gross?" the waiter questioned, nodding toward Barney.

"No," Mr. Gross grunted laconically, his eyes fixed upon the tablecloth, upon which he was drawing geometric designs with his thumb nail.

The waiter gave Barney a searching look of suspicion, evidently questioning the lad's ability to pay, then turned and retreated to the rear. Barney was gravely concerned as to the outcome of his rash venture, but he kept his seat and was duly alert for what ill

might threaten him. However, the waiter filled the two orders and made no further remarks.

Barney and his companion, the morose Mr. Gross, ate in silence. Though there was a sense of dread of impending misadventure weighing upon him, the boy enjoyed his meal. The waiter again came to the table and dropped a small ticket at each plate. Barney had eaten at a restaurant once before, in company with his father, so now he knew the purpose of the bit of pink pasteboard.

"Twenty-five cents," he mumbled, his mouth full of food. "I s'pect they'll get tired of waiting while I count out that many pennies, one at a time, but they'll have to wait—or do without their pay."

He glanced across the table at his companion's ticket; it was marked "30c."

"I don't understand this thing," the boy mused; "we both got the same."

Mr. Gross arose from the table, picked up the ticket and approached the cashier's desk; Barney followed him. Mr. Gross and the cashier got into an altercation—the former claiming that his ticket called for five cents more than his breakfast amounted to, and the latter maintaining that he had nothing to do with that—and the waiter was called up to adjust matters. The delay thus

occasioned enabled Barney to pile upon the desk the twenty-five pennies needful to settle his bill.

The cashier picked up the boy's ticket, glanced at the pile of pennies, and demanded sharply:

"Where did you get those?"

"In my pocket," Barney answered innocently.

"Don't get gay, now!" the cashier snapped.

"Well, I did get them in my pocket—or out of my pocket—I don't know which I ought to say."

And Barney grinned good-naturedly; his breakfast had dispelled his gloomy thoughts and forebodings.

The cashier eyed him keenly for a moment; then he said:

"Where did you get those pennies, before you got them in your pocket?"

"I didn't get them anywhere," Barney replied.

"Oh, come off!" sneered the cashier.

"I didn't," the lad insisted.

"Why, you put them into your pocket, didn't you?"

"No, sir."

"You didn't?"—in great surprise.

"No, sir; I didn't."

"Well, if you didn't, who did?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

Barney shook his head, and added in words: "I don't know how they got into my pocket—I don't know whether anybody put them in there."

The cashier gasped and stared. It was evident he considered the boy a glib but unreasoning young liar.

"Well, we have no use for the pennies," he remarked at last.

"It's all the money I've got," Barney returned.

The cashier irritably raked the pennies into his palm and dropped them into the till. Then he said:

"Now you get out of here, and stay out. There's been a number of tills tapped and slot-machines broken open lately, and the lot of pennies you have and the crooked tale you tell makes me suspicious of you. Don't you come in here any more."

Barney did not tarry to attempt to clear himself of the unjust imputation; he was glad enough to escape without further parley, knowing well he could make no explanation that would be believed.

"This thing's going to get me into a peck of trouble—I can see that," he muttered as he shuffled along the street. "But what else can I do? I'd hunt for work—yes, I would!—if it would do any good. But what use would it be to work and get nothing for it? The money would melt right out of my fingers. Oh, I wish I

could go to work and earn money! I know I could find a job in a big place like this. But there's no use to wish—no use to think about work. All I can do is to do as I am doing, even if they put me in jail for it. Wouldn't I like to wring old White Feather's neck! And I've got to have some new clothes pretty soon—a new hat, anyhow; this old thing's about ready to drop to pieces. Well, I might as well go and try to buy one right now; waiting won't make the job any easier."

Seeing a number of cheap wool hats displayed in front of a store, he stopped and inquired the price.

"Fifty cents apiece," snapped the young salesman, who stood upon the step twirling the brush with which he had been dusting the articles displayed.

Barney doffed his own dilapidated headgear and tried on one hat after another.

"Those are for men," the salesman explained; "you won't find one to fit you. Come inside and I'll sell you a good one—a boy's hat."

"For how much?" Barney inquired.

"One dollar."

"Too much," Barney whispered to himself.

And he continued to try and retry the hats before him. The thought of having to fish one hundred separate coins from his pocket, with the eye of the salesman fixed upon him, was dreadful.

Presently the little fellow selected a hat he thought would do, although it rested snugly upon his ears when he put it on, and said: "I'll take this one."

The salesman smiled pityingly, but he took the hat from the boy's hand and retreated to the interior. Barney followed, and while the salesman was wrapping up the article, the boy industriously and rapidly counted out the pennies necessary to the purchase.

"There you are," remarked the salesman, pushing the package toward the purchaser.

"And there's your money," Barney returned, pointing toward the pile of brazen coins.

"Whew!" whistled the salesman, his eyes very wide. "All in pennies, eh? Say, young man! Where—where—"

And he stopped speaking and stared hard at the urchin. Barney caught up his purchase and made for the door.

"Hold on—wait a moment!" the salesman cried.

But Barney slid out the door, and as he crossed the street he heard the salesman excitedly calling and shouting some one's name.

The lad was so pleased, so elated, over his first attempt to obtain new wearing apparel that a spirit of foolhardiness seized him; and immediately he determined upon a second venture.

A short distance from the scene of his first triumph, he entered

another shop and asked for a shirt. Here a pretty young woman waited upon him. Barney did not know the size of the garment he required, but the pretty young woman thought she knew—after carefully looking him over—and began searching for it. Barney industriously plied his nimble fingers, and just as the saleswoman shoved the wrapped article toward him, he laid the last penny requisite upon the counter.

Then a startling thing happened. The young woman took a hasty look at the pile of pennies and, raising her voice to a shrill screech, called:

"Here's one of them now, Mr. Bristow! Come this way—quick!"

Barney heard quick footsteps and saw several men approaching from the rear of the room. He snatched up his purchases, tucked one under each arm, and made rapidly for the open air.

"Stop him!" shrieked the young woman.

"Head him off!" cried the men.

Out the door and down the street sped Barney, a half-dozen persons in pursuit, all shouting and gesticulating. A number of other shopkeepers and clerks joined in the chase; a dog ran out of an alley and, nipping at the boy's heels, barked vociferously.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" yelled the growing crowd.

A cabman pulled his vehicle across the street to obstruct the

fugitive's flight, but Barney made a detour and was still far ahead of his pursuers.

"Stop the till-tapper! Stop the penny-thief!"

A tall policeman barred the lad's path, swinging his club and commanding: "Halt! Stop! Stop!"

But Barney slid under the upraised arm of the officer, wriggled free from the detaining hand that fell upon his shoulder, and shot into a shadowy passage between two tall buildings. This led him into a big warehouse. Among boxes, barrels, and crates he threaded his way and emerged upon another street. This he crossed, dashed through another alley, and came out upon a quiet thoroughfare where but few people were in sight. All sounds of pursuit had died out, but on and on he went, slowing his pace to avoid attracting undue attention. And he did not stop until he reached the suburbs, a region of vacant lots and tall board fences.

Here he sought out an obscure spot, cast himself down in the grateful shade of a gnarled old apple tree and quickly fell asleep, completely worn out with his morning's adventures.

He awoke with the late afternoon sun shining full in his face. Slowly he got upon his feet, and stretched his limbs and yawned. In an adjacent grove of oak trees a flock of crows were raising a clamorous hubbub and flitting from one perch to another. Presently a great owl emerged from the green of the bit of woodland,

"Stop Thief! Stop Thief!"

in slow and dignified retreat from its tormentors, who were swarming in its wake, cawing uproariously. Leading the band of black marauders was the white-feather crow!

"White Feather! White Feather!" Barney screamed lustily, forgetting in his excitement his need to remain unobserved, his danger from those who were on the outlook for him.

The white-feather crow left the flock following the owl, circled a few times high above Barney's head, and alighted upon the topmost bough of the old apple tree. There it sat, stretching its neck and impudently peering down at the boy.

"White Feather—you mean old thing!" Barney cried, provoked by the crow's cool insolence.

The uncanny bird opened wide its mouth, blinked and gurgled, and rolled its head from side to side, like a person in a spasm of silent laughter.

"Well, you are mean!" Barney sputtered angrily. "You ought to be ashamed, too, playing such a low-down trick upon a poor, innocent boy that never harmed you!"

The white-feather fowl fluttered its plumage, beat its sides with its wings, rolled its eyes, and croaked:

"Haw, haw haw! Pshaw! Pshaw! Bawrney Bylaw!"

"Oh, you can laugh—I don't care!" Barney whined, almost in tears. "But I'll bet you wouldn't laugh if somebody had played

such a trick on you—had got you in such a fix. I'll bet you wouldn't think it much fun to be chased and yelled at and called a thief."

The bird bobbed, cocked its head, and winked impertinently.

"Haw, haw, haw!" it chuckled. "Law, law, Bawrney Bylaw!"

Perhaps it was thinking it had been chased and called a thief many a time; that every member of its family, almost, had been served in like manner. At any rate, it appeared to take a keen delight in the boy's tale of discomfiture.

"Well, I want you to get me out of this fix!" Barney cried pettishly.

"Haw, haw, haw!" the eccentric crow cawed delightedly. "Naw! Naw! Bawrney Bylaw!"

It laughed till it tumbled from its perch, and turned a summersault in mid-air. But it caught itself before striking the ground, and set off after its companions who were mere specks on the smoky horizon.

Barney sighed dolefully as he watched its departure. When it was out of sight, he picked up his bundles and made his way to a brook that ran through the bit of woodland near-by. There he stripped and took a bath in a clear pool. Then he cast aside his old hat and shirt and donned the new ones he had had so much trouble in purchasing, and set out to return to the heart of the city, choosing the less frequented streets to avoid observation.

Chapter VI

AT EIGHT o'clock that evening Barney found himself down at the water front of the city—weary, hunted and hungry. Before him was the river and the shipping; behind him, the great town throbbing with life and restlessness; and around him, a chaos of moving vans, trucks and drays. At the wharves and docks lay great steamers loading and unloading—floating monsters with big black horns and dragon-like eyes, the one red and the other green —and out in mid-stream, a part of the enveloping gloom, were tugs and ferries,—other monsters—puffing, screeching and churning the inky water into sooty foam. A rampart of gloomy warehouses, tall and somber, guarded the shore, and huddled at its base were cheap shops and low saloons.

Barney stood under a swinging, crackling arc-light and viewed the scene, shivering with nervousness, his ears filled with the din of it all, his heart filled with dread of he knew not what. Heavy vehicles creaked and rumbled; drivers whipped and swore. Steamboat mates stormed and cursed, and strings of colored deckhands crooned eerie sing-songs as they streamed along stages and gangplanks. Donkey-engines chugged and snorted; ropes and pulleys

creaked and rattled; boxes, barrels and bales thumped and bumped, as they dropped upon oaken decks or shot swiftly into the yawning holds of great vessels.

Down on one corner of a dock, in the full beam of a steamer's searchlight, but out of the way of rolling trucks and shuffling roustabouts, a small group of street gamins were shaking pennies and laughing and chattering like a bunch of blackbirds. Barney was hungering for boyish companionship, starving for boyish fellowship; and now he threw discretion to the winds, forgot that he was a hunted fugitive, and sauntered down and joined the group of urchins.

"Hello, Rube!" one of

them cried gaily, backing out of the game and making a bow of mock humility to Barney. "Glad to see you. W'en did you get in, Rube?"

"My name isn't Rube," Barney replied quietly, looking over his questioner's bowed head at the boys hunkering upon the dock.

"Aw, yes it is," the street arab laughed, drawing himself erect. "All guys w'at comes from de country is Rubes. Come up to de city to make y'r fortune, I s'pose—all hayseeds does. Well, here's y'r show," striking an attitude and pointing at his kneeling companions. "You can make 'r lose a fortune dere in a very few minutes, as I knows to me sorrow. Dey cleaned me out o' nineteen cents in no time; I's bankrupt, an' got to start life all over again. Ain't you sorry fer me, Rube?"

And the grimy-faced lad sniffled, wiped the back of his hand across his eyes, and made a pretense of weeping.

"But I tell you my name isn't Rube," Barney returned, ignoring the other's plea for sympathy; "it's Barney—Barney Bylow."

"Aw, dat's all right—all right!" the gamin chuckled. "It's a good Irish name, too. Me name's Mickey Marvel, an' I's as Irish as de ol' sod itself. Shake."

The two shook hands, and Mickey continued:

"Want to take a hand?" with a jerk of his thumb indicating the game in progress. "It's great fun, an' maybe you'll win a pile."

"It's gambling, isn't it?" Barney objected. "I don't wan't to gamble."

Those in the game overheard the country boy's remark, and tittered amusedly, but did not stop playing.

"Naw, 'tain't gamblin'," Mickey hastened to explain; "it's jes shakin' pennies. Shootin' craps is gamblin'. Got any pennies—want to try it?"

Barney slowly shook his head.

"It wouldn't do me any good," he remarked.

"Wouldn't do you any good?" Mickey exclaimed incredulously. "W'y, you might win—might win a lot."

"It wouldn't do me any more good to win than to lose," Barney returned in a tone of deep dejection.

"Listen to dat, fellers!" Mickey cried, turning to his companions. "Here's a guy w'at says it wouldn't do him no good to win a-shakin' pennies. W'at do you t'ink o' dat, now?"

"He's a millionaire. an' don't need de money," one of the boys made answer.

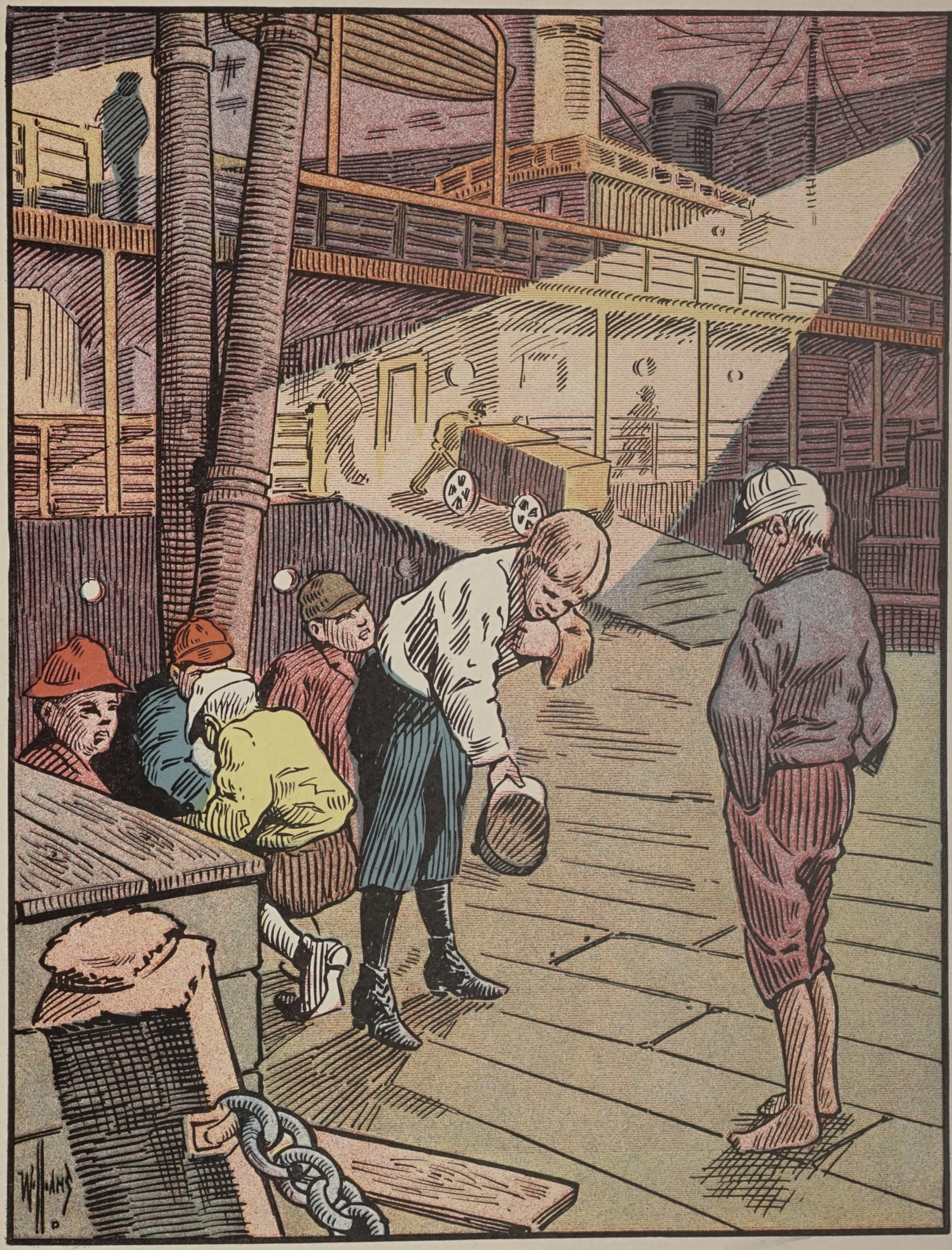
Then all laughed.

"Try it once," Mickey persisted.

Barney shook his head; then he asked shrewdly:

"Why don't you try it again?"

"Didn't I tell you dey'd cleaned me out?" Mickey snapped,



"Hello, Rube! W'en Did You Get In?"

giving an irritable hitch at the bootblack kit suspended from his shoulder.

"I'll lend you some money," Barney offered.

"You will?" in a tone of delight. "How much you got?"

"I've got lots—of pennies."

"Dat's de stuff!" Mickey cried in an ecstacy. "I'll tell you w'at we'll do; we'll play pards. I'll do de playin' an' you'll be de banker. If we wins, we splits even; if we loses, I'll pay you back half soon's I get it. Is dat fair—does dat suit you?"

"I don't want any back, whether you win or lose," Barney replied apathetically.

"You don't?" Mickey exclaimed in astonishment and admiration. And the other boys paused to listen. "Well, you must be a millionaire! You's a dead-game sport, anyhow—dat's sure. But come on. You'll be me mascot, an' I'll jes clean dese fellers out in no time."

The game was played as follows: Each boy put up a penny, then each in turn took up the whole lot of coins, shook them between his palms, and threw them upon the ground. The one throwing the most "heads" won all the pennies. Then all put up a cent each again, and thus the game went on.

But as a mascot Barney for a time proved a rank failure, though he was a commendable success as a "banker." Penny after

penny he passed over to Mickey, who lost, and continued to lose stoically. However, the tide of fortune turned at last in favor of the two "pards," and soon the Irish lad won back all he had lost, and nearly all belonging to his associates.

"Here's w'ere I quits de game," he said decidedly, rising and jingling the money in his pocket.

The other boys did not care to continue to play—with most of the money in Mickey's possession, and he out of the contest—and stood about grumbling at their ill luck.

Mickey was jubilant.

"Didn't I tell you we'd clean 'em up?" he cried gleefully, slapping Barney, who stood a passive spectator of his new-found chum's good fortune, on the back.

"I knowed I could do it in de end; I can alluz play better on borried money—dat's a fack. But say!"—in boundless admiration—"You was cool—cool as an ol' hand at de biz. Me a-losin' an' a losin', an' you a-shovin' up de stuff, a cent at a time—jes as if you had a bar'l of it. Have you got any left?"

"One penny," Barney answered calmly.

"Hullee!" Mickey ejaculated. "Didn't we run a close chance o' goin' broke? Good t'ing de luck changed jes w'en it did. How many pennies did you 'ave in de start—do you know?"

"One," Barney replied composedly.

"Naw!" Mickey exclaimed, provoked at what he thought Barney's thick-headedness. "You's got one now; but how many did you 'ave in de start? See?"

"One," Barney reiterated placidly.

"Aw, come off," Mickey muttered, his deep disgust evident in voice and manner. "W'y, you give me mor'n twenty—dat's sure."

"Yes, an' w'ere did he get 'em?" one of the other boys cried sneeringly. "Maybe he's 'fraid to tell; an' maybe dat's de reason he won't own to havin' so many."

"Look 'ere, Bud Brown!" Mickey snorted hotly, his black eyes flashing. "Don't you go to slingin' no slack like dat, 'r me an' you'll come togedder. Barney's me pard from dis on, an' I's goin' to stand up fer him. See?"

Evidently Bud Brown saw, for he kept a discreet silence.

"Now, Barney," Mickey said, turning to his protegé, "we's goin' to divvy up. Here's half de stuff; take it."

"But I don't want it," Barney protested.

The Irish lad gave a grunt of surprise, and his associates looked at the country boy in open-mouthed wonder.

"You won't take it?" Mickey questioned incredulously. "W'at's de matter wid you, anyhow? 'Fraid shakin' pennies is gamblin'?"

Barney shook his head rather undecidedly, for he was not sure as to the moral status of the game.

"W'at's de matter, den?" Mickey insisted.

Barney made no reply, and the other boys all stood and stared at him.

"Well, you's got to take y'r share of de swag," Mickey said with sudden determination. "Hol' out y'r paw."

But Barney resolutely put his hands behind him.

"Here, dat won't work!" Mickey snapped irritably. "You take dis stuff, 'r I'll shove it in y'r pocket."

"Please—please don't do that!" Barney pleaded earnestly.

Mickey was completely non-plussed; and his companions looked at one another in blank amazement. What sort of youngster was this, who begged not to have money forced upon him?

"W'y—w'y?" was all Mickey could say.

"Because—because," Barney began, then choked, swallowed and went on: "You keep it, Mickey, and buy us both a supper."

"Well, don't dat settle it?" the Irish boy laughed. "Say, fellers! Hear dat? He wants me to buy him a supper." Then to Barney: "Can't you buy y'r own grub? Don't you know w'ere to go an' get it?"

"No," Barney replied.

"Well, I'll go wid you; but you's got to be a man, an' pay y'r own bill. Now take dis stuff."

Barney again quickly put his hands behind him, but Mickey, with a laugh, skilfully dropped the handful of coins into his protegé's left pocket.

"Oh, why did you do that?" Barney wailed. "Now you've lost them all."

All the boys laughed heartily; Barney was the most amusing urchin they had ever met—his verdancy was refreshing.

"Yes, I's lost 'em," Mickey giggled, "but you's got 'em."

"But I haven't got them!" was the astounding declaration.

"W'at!"

"I haven't!"

"W'ere is dey, den?"

"I—I don't know!"

"Aw, come off!"—contemptuously. "Dey's in y'r pocket. Let me see."

Mickey thrust his hand into the unresisting Barney's pocket, and found it empty! The Irish boy started back, pale as paper, his eyes wide open and his mouth quivering.

"W'y—w'y, w'at—w'at did you do wid de money?" he gasped huskily.

"Nothing," Barney replied, fidgeting about uneasily; "I didn't touch it."

"Ain't it dere?" one of the boys inquired with grave interest.

"Naw," said Mickey, solemnly shaking his head.

"Aw, stuff!" sneered one boy.

"Bosh!" commented another.

"It's a fack," declared Mickey. "I's tellin' you de troof. If you doesn't b'lieve it, try fer y'rselves."

The challenge was promptly accepted; one after another thrust a hand into Barney's pocket, and brought forth nothing. Amazement bordering on superstitious awe rested upon each countenance. For a few moments silence reigned.

Then Mickey said with an uneasy laugh: "Say, Barney! You's de greatest ever—you is!"

"The greatest what?" Barney asked.

"W'y de greatest fakir, 'r hoodoo, 'r w'atever you is—dat's w'at."

"But I'm not—" Barney began, in an attempt to disclaim the questionable honor.

"Don't explain nothin' to dese fellers," Mickey shut him up. "I doesn't know how you do it, but you can tell me after w'ile—w'en we's by ourselves. You an' me'll work de graft to beat de band; we can make a bar'l o' stuff—bettin' wid fellers. Gee! But you's

a slick one! An' to t'ink dat I took you fer a softy! Hullee! But come on; let's go an' hunt some grub."

Silently Barney accompanied his new-found friend. The latter led the way to a dingy, ill-smelling restaurant a few squares back from the water-front. There the two seated themselves at a small, oil-cloth-covered table and partook of a supper of garlic-flavored soup and bread and butter.

When they had finished their frugal repast Mickey remarked:

"Now you can settle y'r bill an' I'll settle mine."

"But I have no money," was Barney's natural objection.

"No money?" cried Mickey.

"Only a penny."

"Come off!"—incredulously.

"That's all I have." And Barney held up the single coin, in proof.

"Aw, you's jokin'—you's foolin'!" grinned Mickey. "Don't hand me no gag o' dat kind. Didn't I divvy—didn't I give you half de stuff? You's not got it in y'r pocket, I knows, but you's got it hid 'bout you some'rs. You can't give me no game like dat."

"No indeed—indeed, Mickey," Barney insisted earnestly. "I haven't the money you put in my pocket—not a cent of it anywhere."

Mickey stared, stupefied.

"Honest?" he whispered.

"Honest!" Barney replied with proper solemnity and unction.

"Well, you is a hoodoo!" the Irish ragamuffin muttered, his tone and manner suggesting covert disgust or open admiration—or both.

Then he asked: "W'at become o' de stuff?"

"I don't know."

"Sure?"

"Sure!"

"W'y, Barney, it couldn't get out o' y'r pocket."

"It did," Barney answered.

"Dat's so,"—with a reflective shake of the head.

"Does all money act dat way wid you?"

"Yes."

"Hullee!" exclaimed Mickey, his eyes popping open. "An' dat's w'y you didn't want to take de swag—de stuff I put in y'r pocket, den?"

"Yes," Barney admitted.

"W'at got you in such a fix as dat?" Mickey questioned.

"I—I don't want to tell you," Barney stammered; "you wouldn't believe me; you'd think me crazy."

Mickey was silent a moment, then made answer musingly: "I guess dat's right. No feller could explain a t'ing o' dat kind widout me callin' him nutty—crazy. It's a mighty tough shape for a

chap to be in, too." Then, suddenly, after another moment of grave thought: "Well, I sp'ose I'll 'ave to settle de bill fer us bofe. W'ere you goin' to hang out tonight?"

"Where am I going to stay—to sleep?" Barney returned.

"Sure."

"I don't know; I have no place."

"Well, you can roost wid me," Mickey offered. "I's got a nest in de attic o' one o' de rookeries on de river bank. Jes wait till I settle de bill, an' we'll go an' turn in."

On his return from making payment to the proprietor, who was himself waiting on table in the rear of the room, the Irish lad remarked carelessly:

"W'en I give dat bloke de stuff all in coppers he laughed an' said de cops was lookin' fer a kid dat had been shovin' a lot of 'em all over de town. Come on; le's be turnin' in fer a snooze."

At the announcement Barney changed color, but Mickey did not notice his companion's agitation, and together the two left the place.

As they were slowly climbing the dark, rickety stairs leading up to Mickey's den under the eaves of a tall rookery, the country boy asked:

"Are you an orphan, Mickey?"

"Yep," Mickey replied laconically and complacently, as though

orphanage were the natural and to-be-desired state of all youngsters.

Barney sighed heavily; he was thinking of home and its manifold comforts.

On reaching the small room which Mickey had graphically and truthfully described as a "nest," and which was lighted alone by a dingy skylight, the two tumbled down upon a pallet of musty comforters in one corner and sought rest and sleep.

But just as Barney was crossing the border of dreamland, Mickey called him back with:

"Say, Barney?"

"What?" the latter responded drowsily.

Mickey sat erect and asked: "If you can't keep no money in y'r pockets, how did it come you could give me all dem coppers to shake wid? Say!"

"I just gave you one at a time," Barney offered in explanation.

"Dat's all right," Mickey said; "but you had more dan one in y'r pocket, 'r else you couldn't 'ave give me so many."

"I didn't have more than one at a time in my pocket."

"W'at!"

"I didn't."

"Doesn't you never?"

"No, and when I take that one out another one comes."

"Hullee!" was all Mickey could say.

After a momentary silence he dropped back upon the cot, muttering:

"Well, if dat don't jar me! I can't make nothin' of it; I can't understand it."

"Neither can—can I," Barney mumbled sleepily.

A few minutes later both were sound asleep, and Barney was dreaming of the comforts of home, perhaps, and Mickey was dreaming of a morrow free from want and care.

Chapter VII

THE next morning Barney and Mickey, lying upon their humble pallet and lazily blinking at the gray dawn stealing in through the dingy skylight, resolved themselves into a ways and means committee, and discussed what they would do and how they would do it.

"De first t'ing," Mickey remarked, with an earnestness and solemnity befitting to the subject and the occasion, "is to see 'bout gettin' some breakfast."

"I'd like to wash first," Barney made reply, the force of habit strong upon him.

"Wash w'at?" Mickey interrogated.

"My hands and face—and comb my hair," said Barney.

"W'at you wants to do all dat fer?"

"Because I'd feel better, and because it's the proper thing to do. Mother taught me to wash before meals, always. Don't you ever wash, Mickey?"

"No. W'at's de use? A feller jes' goes an' gets dirty ag'in."

Barney was shocked, and gave his companion a brief lecture upon the ethics of cleanliness.

"You's got parents, eh?" Mickey said sullenly.

"Yes," Barney answered.

"An' I s'pose you run off from a good home?"

Barney admitted the fact.

"An' you never had to shift fer y'rself, never had to make y'r own livin'—eat w'atever you could ketch, an' sleep w'erever you could find a place to drop down, eh?"

"N-o, not till now," Barney replied, a catch in his voice.

"Den you doesn't know nothin'—nothin' at all," Mickey declared. "Wait till you's been up ag'in de t'ing as long's I 'ave—den you can talk. You's a plumb fool, Barney—you is!"

"Why?"

" 'Cause you is—fer comin' to de city; fer cuttin' loose from de ol' folks. You's got a heap to learn, you has."

"Maybe I was foolish to leave home," Barney said, after a few moments of sober reflection, "and maybe I have a lot to learn, but I've got to learn it—that's all. I won't go back home—not yet, anyhow."

"W'y?"

"Because."

" 'Cause w'at? 'Fraid de ol' man'll flog you?"

"N-o."

"W'at, den?"

"All the people—all the boys, especially—would laugh at me," Barney explained.

"I sees," said Mickey, nodding sagely. "Dat's so. Well, den, if you's made up y'r mind to stay in de game, le's plan out w'at we's goin' to do. Course I could go out an' do a few shines," patting the kit at his side, "but I's hungry right now."

"I can furnish the pennies," Barney grinned, rising, "but—but—"

"But w'at?" Mickey asked quickly.

"I don't want to pass them."

"W'y doesn't you?"

"I'm the boy the police are after."

"Hullee!" was Mickey's exclamation of surprise. "Is dat so! No wonder you's shy of passin' any more of 'em. But I'll do it; I isn't scared of shovin' 'em. Fish 'em out; I'll fill me pockets."

Barney obeyed the order, dropping one penny after another into Mickey's ready palm; and the latter crammed his pockets until they bulged.

At last he announced: "Dat's plenty—fer dis time." Then abruptly: "Say!"

"Well?" said Barney.

"Wonder if I could pull out coppers, an' keep a-pullin' 'em out f'rever an' f'rever, as you does, if I had on dem pants o' y'rs."

"Wonder if you could," Barney speculated.

"Le's swap pants, an' see," Mickey suggested.

"All right," Barney agreed.

Acting upon the spur of the moment, they made the exchange. Mickey immediately explored the depths of his new possessions, and brought forth the penny he found.

"Dere's one," he said, holding it up between the thumb and finger of his right hand.

Barney nodded.

Mickey transferred the coin to his left palm, and made a second exploration, but his hand came forth empty.

"Dere's no more dere," he announced in a tone of disappointment.

"Of course not," Barney laughed. "You can have only one penny at a time. You'll have to get rid of that one in your hand before another'll come in your pocket."

"W'y, dat's a fack," Mickey grinned. "I clean fergot 'bout dat. I'll t'row dis one on de floor."

He did so, and again sent his right hand to the bottom of his pocket.

"Any there?" Barney inquired with keen expectancy.

"Naw," Mickey replied, disgust evident in voice and manner. "De t'ing only works fer you. Le's swap back."

Barney nodded approval to the proposition, and a minute later each boy was again in possession of his own trousers.

"De t'ing's in you, Barney, an' not in y'r trousers," Mickey declared emphatically.

Barney nodded his conviction of the truth of the statement.

"Hullee!" cried Mickey, with startling suddenness, throwing up his hands.

"What's—what's the matter?" asked the country boy, in genuine concern.

Mickey burst out laughing.

"W'y, all dem coppers you give me is gone; me pockets is empty. Wouldn't dat shake you?"

"I put on your trousers, you know," Barney said, grinning sheepishly, "and I can't have more than a penny. See?"

"Well, I guesses I sees," the Irish lad replied, making a wry face. "An' I sees, too, dat we's got to do our job all over ag'in—got to make anoder draw on de bank. Understand?"

"Yes."

"All right, den. Fork over."

Again Barney "forked over," and again Mickey crammed his pockets.

"Are you going to spend all those today?" the former asked, uneasiness patent in his voice.

"Yep—fer sure," was the determined response. "Wa't's de use o' havin' a good graft an' not workin' it—hey?"

"But I'm afraid of the police," Barney objected.

"Aw, stuff!" Mickey cried scornfully. "De cops won't get onto de game; dey's slow—dead slow."

"They got onto me," the country boy answered petulantly.

"Yes, dat's so," Mickey admitted. "But you tried to shove de stuff at stores, an' places like dat, didn't you—puttin' up a cent at a time?"

"Yes."

"Well," the Irish lad went on with complacent self-confidence, "I knows a game dat beats dat one a block. All de boys is wantin' coppers to shake an' match wid, an' all de fruit-stand fellers is wantin' 'em fer change; so I'll jest swap wid 'em—tradin' pennies fer nickles, an' dimes, an' quarters. See? Dey'll all be glad to get 'em, an' I'll give 'em a few extra ones ev'ry deal—no need o' us bein' stickin'—an' dey'll feel good, an' won't squeal. W'at does you t'ink o' dat fer a scheme?"

"It's all right," Barney said, with manifest admiration for his partner's resourcefulness.

"Den le's take a sneak, an' see how de t'ing works."

Forth the two went, and had breakfast and put Mickey's expedient in operation. It worked admirably. Soon the stock of pen-

nies was exhausted, but the Irish boy had a handful of coins of larger denominations. Then they adjourned to a secluded spot, and when they emerged Mickey's pockets were again bulging with pennies.

Until noon they worked "de graft," as Mickey termed it. Then he remarked:

"Seems to me we's done enough fer one day. Le's count up, an' see how much we got."

"That's what I say," Barney assented heartily. He was weary of tramping from one part of the city to another; and his nerves were worn with the excitement of what he regarded as ever-present danger of arrest and imprisonment.

"Purty nigh ten dollars," Mickey announced jubilantly, when he had completed the count of the money in his possession. "Hullee! Ain't dat great? W'y dis graft's better'n a license to steal—an' dat's no joke. Now, we'll lay off an' spend w'at we's got; den we'll dig up ag'in."

"I can't spend any of it," Barney remarked rather downheartedly.

"Dat's all right—all right," Mickey cried cheerily, giving his partner a reassuring slap on the back. "I can spend it fer you; it's jes de same. See?"

"What'll we spend it for?" Barney asked by way of reply.

"W'at'll we spend it fer?" Mickey laughed. "Well, listen at de chump! Spend it fer all de t'ings we wants, dat's w'at; fer candy, an' lemonade, an' ice-cream, an' all dem t'ings. Den we'll tend de 'teayters, ride on de 'lectric cars, go out to de parks an' de zoo, take in de 'scursions up to de Island—an' all dem 'musements. Aw, we'll find plenty to spend it fer—leave dat to me. An' I doesn't peddle no more papers 'r shine no more shoes—dat's flat. I's a capitalist now, I is."

"And what am I?" Barney inquired, plainly dissatisfied with the unimportant and passive part he was compelled to play.

"W'y, you's me silent pardner," Mickey answered composedly. "Come on, let's go an' 'ave a bang-up dinner."

For several days, Barney could never tell how many, for one day seemed to merge into another in a way that was most perplexing, the two "pards" carried out the plans that had origin in the fertile brain of the Irish boy. They gorged themselves with indigestible sweetmeats; they set their stomachs awash with unwholesome beverages. They bought themselves new clothes—loud and bizarre; they went to all sorts of public entertainments—wherever they could gain admittance—and indulged in all sorts of amusements. Mickey smoked cigarettes, and bragged in a loud and lordly way; Barney chewed gum and swaggered. Both were fast becoming idle, unprincipled nuisances. The city boy had been industrious and hon-

est, to say the least; the country boy had been clean and upright, if just a little perverse. But now the two were in a fair way to degenerate into worthless, nasty little criminals.

Yet all of Mickey's former associates looked admiringly upon the twain, and envied them their remarkable good fortune.

One day the two partners went up to the Island, a summer

resort a few miles from the city. On the way back Mickey cocked his heels upon the guard-rail of the boat, blew a cloud of cigarette smoke into the air, and drawled lazily and affectedly:

"Ain't dis great, me friend? We's havin' de times of our lives, we is; we's cuttin' as big a swell as millionaires does. Ain't it bully? Say!"

"I'm getting tired of it," Barney said gloomily.

"Tired o' w'at?" Mickey asked sharply, jerking down his feet and whirling around in his chair.

"Of the city—of everything," Barney answered.

"An' I s'pose you's t'inkin' o' playin' de prodigal son—t'inkin' o' goin' back home?" Mickey sneered.

"Yes," Barney replied simply.

"Well, you isn't a-goin' to do it—you hears me!" Mickey cried angrily.

"Why?" the country boy inquired innocently.

"W'y!" Mickey snapped. "Jes 'cause you isn't—dat's w'y. S'pose I's goin' to let loose of a good t'ing like dis is? Hullee! Not if I knows meself!"

"I can go if I want to," Barney said stubbornly.

"Well, you can't—so dere!"

"I will!"

"You won't!"

Then each sat and glared at the other—unrighteous rage flushing both boyish faces; but neither would condescend to utter a further word on the subject.

It was dark when the excursion steamer reached the city. Mickey and Barney silently debarked, and upon the wharf were met by Bud Brown.

"I'se been waiting to see you two fellers," he said.

"W'at fer—w'at you want?" was Mickey's ungracious inquiry.

"Want to know w'at terms you's goin' to offer me," Bud replied smoothly.

"Terms?" Mickey cried.

"Yep—terms," Bud said with an insolent grin. "You two blokes has been a-flyin' high—wearin' swell togs an' takin' in all de shows, an' all dat. I wants to be a member of de firm. See?"

"Well, you can't," snapped Mickey.

"Can't I?" his insolent grin widening.

"No, you can't."

"W'y?"

" 'Cause you can't—dat's all."

"Dat's y'r final answer, is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Den I knows wa't to d'pend on—an' w'at to do," Bud said, turning away.

"W'at you mean?" Mickey asked, with growing uneasiness.

"Nothin'," Bud answered surlily, making off up the wharf.

"Look 'ere, Bud," Mickey hastened to say in a more conciliatory tone. "Me and Barney can't take no more pards in on dis t'ing. If we could, we'd take you. Wouldn't we, Barney?"

Barney nodded a doubtful and almost imperceptible affirmative.

"But we can't at all, can we, Barney?" Mickey pursued.

Barney grunted a decided and unmistakable negative.

"Den de jig's up, all right," Bud muttered.

"W'at you mean?" Mickey growled. "Out wid it."

"Jes dis," Bud answered coolly: "I comes in on de graft, 'r I tells de cops."

"Tell de cops?" Mickey gasped, aghast at his former associate's perfidious design. "Tell 'em w'at?"

"Dat you two is de guys dat's been tappin' all de tills an' robbin' all de slot machines," was Bud's cool reply.

"But we isn't!" Mickey objected.

"Maybe you can make de judge b'lieve dat—w'en twenty witnesses swears dat you's been blowin' in all kinds o' money—maybe you can," Bud sneered; "and maybe you can explain w'ere you got all de money you's been spendin'—if you didn't steal it."

Tongue-tied with surprise, Barney and Mickey stood and stared

at the audacious speaker. Presently, however, the Irish boy found voice to say:

"An' you's goin' to peach—goin' to tell de cops?"

"Yes, I is."

'Do it, den—you sneak!" Mickey cried wrathfully, recklessly.

Bud Brown gave a taunting laugh, and ran away. Barney and Mickey silently made their way to their den under the eaves of the tall rookery, crestfallen and thoughtful.

Chapter VIII

THE two partners clattered down the stairs next morning, Mickey in the lead. Barely had they reached the open air, when a stalwart policeman collared the Irish boy and made a grab for his companion. But the nimble Barney eluded the officer's grasp and went ducking and dancing into the middle of the street. There he stopped, wheeled half around and looked back at his unfortunate chum.

"Come back here," the policeman called; "I want you, too."

Barney hesitated, his dread of arrest and imprisonment contending with his respect for a representative of the law and his sense of loyalty to his "pard."

"Come back here," the officer repeated sternly, firmly holding the squirming Mickey by the collar. "If you don't, it'll be the worse for you when I do get you. Come on."

"Don't you do it, Barney!" Mickey yelled. "Tote de mail—take a sneak. You can't help me; I's pinched fer keeps. Pull y'r freight, I say! Get out o' town an' light fer home; de jig's up."

Still Barney hesitated; he felt it would be traitorous to desert his friend in time of trouble. The policeman made a move toward him, almost dragging the resisting Irish boy.

"Scoot!" Mickey screamed frantically. "Skedaddle, Barney! Doesn't you hear me—hasn't you got a mite o' gumption? Dey'll

jug us bofe. But maybe if you's out, you can find a way to get me out. Look sharp! Make a run fer it!"

The officer was close upon the country boy and reaching a great paw for him. Reluctantly Barney acted upon Mickey's advice. One swift glance of friendship and pity, and he turned and sped away up the water-front.

"Here!" the policeman bawled lustily. "Come back here, you young scalawag!"

But Barney kept on.

"Goodbye, Barney!" Mickey cried, his brave young voice quavering. Barney could not reply for the lump in his throat, but he waved his hand, and continued his flight without looking back.

An hour later, when he was many blocks from the scene of the distressing misadventure, he stopped, heaved a deep sigh, and stood gazing vacantly into a shop window, seeing nothing.

"I must find some way of getting Mickey out of this scrape," he mused dejectedly, digging his hands deep into his pockets. "I got him into it. No, I didn't, either; old White Feather got us both into it. The mean old thing!" his anger rising at thought of the Witch-Crow and her doings. "If I ever meet her again, I'll stone her to death!"

"Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Why—why, that sounds like her laughing now," the boy muttered, starting and staring all around.

No bird of any kind was in sight, but the stooped figure of a little old woman in black was just disappearing around a neighboring street corner.

"I wonder if that is White Feather," the lad whispered to himself; "it must be—I'm sure I heard her laugh."

And immediately he set out in pursuit of the familiar figure he had glimpsed. But on turning the corner he discovered nothing, nobody; not a soul was in sight in the direction in which the little old woman had apparently gone.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," Barney muttered peevishly. "I guess I must be going crazy. I thought I heard the Witch-Crow laugh, and I thought I saw her hobble around the corner, but it seems I didn't hear nor see anybody."

For a full minute he stood there, perplexed and wondering, absent-mindedly digging his small fists into his pockets.

Presently he brought forth in his left hand a creased and soiled card, and having smoothed it out in his palm he read:

MISS LILLIAN BRAINARD,
1492 E. COLUMBUS ROAD

Barney started.

"I'll go to her," he murmured under his breath. "She's the

young lady that had the pretty ponies, and she said if I ever needed help, to come to her. Well, if a fellow ever needed help, I need it now. I'll go to her right away. But I wonder where Columbus Road is. I'm afraid to ask a policeman; I'll inquire at the drug store I just passed."

He acted upon his resolution, and learned that Columbus Road ran east and west some eight squares north of where he was, and that the number he sought was several miles from the business portion of the city—far out in a new and fashionable residence district.

The druggist volunteered the information:

"It's a driving road; no car-line on it. You've got a hot walk before you."

"Uh-huh," Barney answered with an apathetic nod, and he turned and left the place, forgetting to thank the man for his kindness.

He found the street he sought, and trudged off eastward. Fifteen minutes walk brought him to a long bridge spanning the river. He crossed this and kept on. Little by little, he left the hurly-burly behind; more and more the aspect of the shifting scene changed. The city fell away; the country appeared on all sides; but still the broad ribbon of asphalt, hot and glaring in the summer sunshine, stretched on endlessly.

"I ought to be nearly there," the boy grumbled, pausing to take

a deep breath and mop the perspiration from his flushed face. "Surely I am nearly there. But this doesn't look much like a new and fashionable residence place—nothing but old orchards, and weed-grown fields, and tumble-down fences and barns." And he accorded the surroundings a sweeping glance of contempt.

"Well, I might as well move on," he muttered; "she lives out on this road somewhere, I reckon. Several miles! Well, I think—what's that?" The boy started back in affright as a large, black bird flew across the road just in front of him, brushing his face with its wings.

"Caw, caw, caw! Haw, haw, haw!" it screamed hoarsely, flapping leisurely toward a tall dead tree in the adjoining field. There it alighted and unconcernedly began to plume itself. It was the white-feather crow.

Barney was hungry and heart-sore, and as a result was easily angered. This latest bit of impudence on the part of the Witch-Crow, as the lad viewed the matter, added insult to injury. So now he yelled frantically, shaking his fist in impotent rage:

"Never mind, old White Feather, never mind! I'll get even with you! You hateful old thing! O, I wish I had a gun! I'd follow you and shoot you if it took me all day. But my turn'll come. Never you mind!"

The crow went on pluming itself, giving no heed to the boy's

intemperate speech. Perhaps it did not hear him, for the tree upon which it had perched stood at quite a distance from the highway.

"Oh, you can't fool me, old White Feather!" Barney blustered. "You can pretend you don't hear me—or pretend it isn't you; but I know; I saw the white stripe down your back. You won't answer, won't you? I'll see about that!"

Forgetting for the moment the urgency of the mission upon which he had set out, the angry boy began to search from one side of the road to the other for gravel or bits of stone. He meant to climb the fence, draw near the tree upon which the insolent crow sat, and compel it to take flight. And so intent upon this new purpose was he, that he did not hear an approaching automobile speeding toward the city—that he gave no heed to the repeated sound of a shrill whistle, till the machine was almost upon him.

The single occupant of the vehicle was a young man. He swerved the auto sharply to the right, barely missing the urchin and almost ditching the machine in a deep gutter at the roadside, skilfully regained the center of the asphalt roadway, and brought the car to a standstill fifty yards beyond the place of meeting. But in the maneuver he was somewhat shaken up, his temper was ruffled, and his coat hanging over the back of the seat fell to the ground.

"Look here, youngster!" he cried sharply, turning and looking over his shoulder and panting with vexation and excitement. "I

came near running over you. Why didn't you get out of the road? I whistled three times. If you want to dream, you'd better go over there in the field and lie down under a tree."

"I wasn't dreaming," Barney answered indignantly, but shuddering at thought of the danger he had escaped. "I was just hunting for stones."

"Hunting for stones?" the young man said, smiling. "What in the world did you want of stones?"

"To throw at that mean old crow over there," with a jerk of his thumb indicating the bird. "I meant to go over there and scare her away."

"Oh, that's it," laughed the young man.

"Yes, sir."

"And what has the crow done to you?"

Barney made no reply.

"Stolen your eggs?" the young man suggested.

Barney shook his head.

"Carried off your young chickens?"

Another negative shake of the boy's head.

"What then?"

No response from Barney.

"Well," the young man said petulantly, "if you won't tell, you

won't. But I've fooled away enough time, and must be going. Want to ride?"

"I'm not going toward the city."

"Oh, you're not."

"No sir. I'm going out to see Miss Lillian Brainard."

"The deuce you are!" the young man exclaimed, his brows elevated.

"Yes, sir, I am," Barney said sturdily. "Do you know where she lives?"

"Well, I should say!" the young man chuckled. "But what do you want to see her for?"

"I don't want to be saucy," Barney said hesitatingly, "but—"

"But what?"

"I don't know that it's any of your business what I want to see Miss Brainard for."

The young man threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"That's cool," he shouted gleefully, slapping his thigh, "and it's true, too. You don't know that it's any of my business, but I know it is. I'm her affianced husband—perhaps, and I'm jealous of you—maybe." And again he roared with laughter.

Barney was nettled by the young man's hilarity. "I hope she's not going to marry you," he muttered in a fierce undertone.

"What's that you say?" the young man inquired quickly.

"I said I hoped she wouldn't marry you."

"Why?" with amused interest.

"Because you're not good enough for her—that's why," Barney answered boldly.

The young man instantly sobered.

"You're right—that's a fact," he said earnestly. "But how did you know it—how did you find it out? Come here and tell me."

Barney slowly approached the automobile and told the young man of his meeting with Miss Brainard and of her promise to help him.

"I bet you're telling the truth; that sounds just like some of her doings," the young man said solemnly, when Barney had concluded his recital. "She is too good for me—or any other man, and no one knows it better than I do. But I must be going. Tramp out and see her; the house is about a half-mile beyond the turn of the road yonder. And say a good word for me," smiling. "Hello! Where's my coat? Why, yonder it is, at the side of the gutter. Bring it to me, please."

Barney obediently went to fetch the garment indicated, and the young man gave his attention to the machine. When the boy had restored the coat to its owner the latter remarked:

"I presume I didn't lose anything out of the pockets; I'll see, though. Here's my pocketbook, all right. Wonder if everything's in it."

"Where's The Money," He Asked Coldly.

Immediately Barney turned pale and began to tremble. He knew that if there had been money in the pocketbook it was gone and he scented danger. The young man opened the case of red morocco, and gave a sudden start.

"Why—why—" he began. Then he stopped short and looked the lad full in the face.

"What's—what's the matter?" Barney asked in a husky whisper, his dry lips hardly able to frame the words.

"My money's gone," the young man announced gravely, sadly.

Barney could make no reply, and the young man reached out and took him by the arm.

"Where is it—where's the money that was in this pocketbook?" he asked coldly.

"I don't know anything about it," Barney stammered.

"Yes, you do," the young man said severely. "Don't you lie to me!"

"I don't know anything about it, I tell you," Barney insisted, wriggling to get free. "I didn't know that there was any money in the pocketbook."

"Well, there was, and you took it out," giving the boy a shake. "Shove it over; give it to me."

"I haven't got it," Barney pleaded truthfully. "Let me go; you're hurting me."

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"Oh, yes, I'll let you go!" the young man sneered. "You fork over that money, you young thief, or I'll take you back to town and hand you over to the police."

Barney was hungry, weak and miserable, and now he burst into tears.

"No use in sniffling," the young man said brutally. "You took the money—nearly eighty dollars, all in bills—while my back was turned. I believe you snatched my coat off the seat when I was passing you. That's it—that's what you were in the middle of the road for. But hand it over; and I'll turn you loose."

"I tell you I haven't got your money, indeed, indeed I haven't!" Barney sobbed.

"You're a lying, little thief!" the young man cried angrily. "And you've been lying to me all the time about Miss Brainard. I'll see if you haven't the money." And he roughly went through the lad's pockets. Then, not finding what he sought and expected to find, of course, he was more angry than before, and he began to shake and curse the boy, and demand to know what he had done with the money.

Thoroughly frightened, Barney could only weep and struggle to get free. So the young man dragged him into the automobile and set out for the city, wrathfully and recklessly running his machine at the highest speed.

And flapping in pursuit came the Witch-Crow, cawing delightedly:

"Haw, haw, haw! Bawrney Bylaw! Broke the law, law, law! Bed of straw, straw, straw! Bawrney Bylaw!"

Chapter IX

AN hour later Barney was shoved into a cell at the city prison. The iron door clanged behind him, and there he stood in the middle of the floor, trying to pierce the gloom of the dusky interior.

"Well, hullee gee!" came an exclamation from a dark corner.

"Mickey!" Barney cried in mingled surprise and delight, groping his way toward the dark corner whence the voice came.

"Yes, it's me—

Mickey," the Irish lad returned, rising to a sitting posture and swinging his legs from the couch upon which he had been lying. "An' it's you, is it, Barney?"

"Yes," the latter replied, weakly dropping down beside his friend.

"Well, you's a bird, you is!" the Irish boy flared contemptuously.

"Why?" Barney inquired innocently.

"W'y!" Mickey snarled. "'Cause you is—dat's w'y. Lettin' de cops gobble you in, after you had de start you had. You's a bird, Barney, sure t'ing!"

"But the police didn't catch me," Barney answered.

"Naw?" Mickey questioned. "Come off! How'd you get here, den?"

Barney entered into a full explanation, and at the conclusion of the recital, Mickey said with a gasp:

"Hullee! Barney, you is hoodooed fer sure—an' fer keeps! An' you's hoodooed me; an' we's bofe in hock. An' how we's goin' to get out is more dan I knows. A Witch-Crow! Hullee!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Both lads glanced quickly toward the grated window whence the sound came.

There sat the white-feather crow peering through the bars at them and chuckling and fluffing its feathers.

"You mean old witch—you!" Barney cried in a tempest of in-

stant anger, dashing to the window and impotently shaking the grating.

The bird dropped from the stone ledge and flew away, cawing delightedly:

"Haw, haw, haw! Saw, saw, saw! Bawrney Bylaw!"

Mickey joined his companion in distress at the window and both stood and watched the crow's flight over the house-tops—then stared at each other in dumb silence.

"Well, wouldn't dat jar you!" Mickey jerked out at last. "I t'ought all de time you was nutty—was out o' y'r head—dat dere wasn't no Witch-Crow. I jest pr'tended to b'lieve w'at you said, jest to humor you. But I saw it, an' I heard it—heard it talk! An' it laughed an' said, 'Saw, saw, saw!' jest as plain as anybody could say it. Wonder w'at it meant, Barney?"

Barney thoughtfully but dejectedly shook his head.

"W'y, looky here!" Mickey exclaimed, picking up an object from the window-sill.

It was a small, bright steel saw and the two boys looked at it and at each other in blank amazement.

"It's a saw," Mickey whispered hoarsely, after an ineffectual attempt to speak aloud.

Barney nodded gravely.

"An' dat crow—'r Witch-Crow, 'r w'atever it is—put it dere."

Again Barney nodded.

"W'ere do you s'pose she got it?"

Barney shook his head.

"Well, anyhow, she meant us to use it to get out o' here wid," Mickey declared.

"Eh?" Barney cried quickly, brightening visibly. "Is—is that what—what it's for?"

"W'y, course it is, numskull!" Mickey exclaimed scornfully. "W'at did you s'pose it was fer—to trim our corns wid?"

"No," Barney said slowly and apathetically—but grinning in spite of himself.

"Well, didn't you hear de ol' Witch-Crow sayin,' 'Saw, saw, saw?' "

"I did—that's so," Barney admitted, again brightening. "But what can we saw, Mickey? We can't saw these iron bars—of course we can't."

"Course we can," Mickey returned sturdily. "Dey's soft iron an' de saw's hard steel; it'll go troo 'em like—like anyt'ing. We'll saw off one end of 'em and bend 'em out of de way. Den we can crawl troo de winder an' drop onto de roof below—'tain't more'n ten foot of a drop an' skedaddle down de fire-escape. Ain't dat a scheme—say? W'en night comes we'll get out o' here. Ain't dat so—hey?"

And the Irish lad joyfully slapped his companion on the shoulder, to arouse him from his apathy.

"I—don't—believe—I'll—do—it," Barney announced deliberately, carefully weighing each word.

"W'y?" Mickey ejaculated in unbounded surprise.

"I don't think it would be right," Barney explained.

"Stuff!" sneered his "pard."

"I don't."

"W'y?"

"Because—because if—well, I don't know why it would be wrong," Barney stammered lamely, "but I think it would be. When a fellow breaks out of jail, everybody thinks him guilty of whatever he was put in for; and I don't want people to think me guilty of—of stealing. Then, they'd catch us again, maybe, and they'd keep us in prison longer than ever."

"Dat ain't no joke!" Mickey said with truth and unction. "But w'at's we goin' to do, den? De judge'll send us up fer somethin'; an' we hain't been doin' nothin'."

Barney had no solution for the vexing problem, so he replied: "You can break out if you want to, Mickey."

"An' leave you here?"

"Yes."

"Dat'd be real nice, now wouldn't it!" Mickey flared up angrily. "Well, I won't do it—so dere!"

"I ran away when the policeman got you," Barney remarked.

"Dat was differ'nt."

"How?"

"I was pinched; you wasn't. Now we's bofe pinched. See?"

Barney failed to "see," and so expressed himself; but Mickey scorned to offer further explanation, and the subject was dropped.

The turnkey came in with their dinners and remained in the cell while they ate. When the fellow was gone, Mickey suggested:

"Le's take a snooze; it'll help to pass away de time."

So the two tumbled down upon the couch in the corner of the room and slept until evening. They were awakened by the turnkey bringing in their suppers.

He said to them:

"You two'll be up before the judge in the morning. And you'd better tell the truth—better confess; he'll be easier on you."

"W'at's we charged wid?" Mickey asked.

"Don't you know?" returned the man.

"Naw."

"You're charged with stealing—breaking open slot machines and tapping tills; he's charged with highway robbery."

"Hullee!" was Mickey's amazed ejaculation. "Dat's purty near as bad as bein' charged wid dynamite!"

And he stood and stared, his mouth half open.

"And the proof's dead against both of you," the turnkey went on; "and you'd better plead guilty."

Then he passed out and closed and locked the door.

"W'at you got to say to dat, Barney—stealin' an' highway robbery?" Mickey asked, when the turnkey's steps had died out along the corridor.

Barney sadly shook his head, but offered no reply in words. After a reflective silence of a few minutes, Mickey remarked tentatively:

"Seems sort o' kind o' dat ol' Witch-Crow to bring us a saw; an' sort o' shabby in us not to use it."

Barney maintained a moody silence; and Mickey proceeded:

"It—'r she—'r w'atever de t'ing is—can't be as bad as you t'ink, Barney—tryin' to do us a favor o' dat kind. Wa't you say?"

"She's just trying to get us into more trouble," Barney pouted.

"T'ink so?"

"Yes, I do," positively.

"Maybe you's right," Mickey murmured thoughtfully; "you knows a heap more 'bout Witch-Crows dan I does. An' I doesn't want to know no more 'bout 'em dan I does—dat's a fack. I'll jest

t'row dis saw out de winder; den I won't be t'inkin' 'bout gettin' out no more. An' w'en I does get out o' here I's goin' back to my kit—back to honest work. I doesn't want no more easy money in mine—I doesn't."

"No, nor me!" Barney cried animatedly if ungrammatically. "If I ever get out of this scrape, I'm going right back home to—to mother and father."

His voice faltered and tears came into his eyes. "And I'll never growl again, because I have to work. Oh, I wish I was at home to-night!"

There came a sudden tapping at the window grating, and a hoarse voice cried:

"Haw, haw, haw! Pshaw, pshaw, pshaw! Bawrney By-law!"

Then there was a flutter of wings, and silence. Barney and Mickey listened intently, but no further sound came from the window. Evidently the white-feather crow had again taken its departure.

Lonely and dejected, the boys again lay down to sleep, their arms around each other. But the night was long, their rest was broken, their dreams were harassing, and they longed for morning —yet dreaded what it might bring to them.

Chapter X

IT was nine o'clock the next forenoon when the turnkey came into the cell and said briskly:

"The judge is waiting for you two fellows. Come along." Then, with a nasty grin, "And I wouldn't be in your shoes for anything. His Honor's in a mighty bad humor about something; he talks gruffer and hoarser than I ever heard him, and then he's all trigged out in a way I never saw him before. He's got on a long black robe and a hood, and he just sits with his head down and don't have much to say. Oh, you chaps will catch it!" chuckling. "His Honor isn't a very big man in body, but he's a giant as a judge. But come on; he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

The boys—duly impressed with the thought of the court and the occasion—silently and soberly followed the turnkey up stairs to a large, uncarpeted room, dusky and depressing. The walls were bare, the windows were dusty and cobwebbed. From the center of the ceiling hung a gas chandelier, but the jets were unlighted. Stiff-backed benches stood about the floor, occupied by persons lounging in various attitudes, and at one side of the room was a tall desk and a revolving stool, upon which sat a black-robed and huddled figure.

and Barney Bylow

The boys swept their eyes about the interior as they entered. In one corner Barney discovered Miss Brainard and the young man of the automobile, and Mickey became aware of the presence of the policeman who had arrested him, and nudged his companion and pointed a finger at the officer. Miss Brainard smiled reassuringly at Barney, and the policeman nodded good-naturedly at Mickey.

Then Barney's eye lighted upon the person of the judge, and the country boy started and gripped his companion's arm.

"Mickey!" he whispered agitatedly.

"W'at?" asked the Irish lad in a cautious undertone.

"The—the judge looks like old White Feather—the Witch-Crow!"

"Hullee!" Mickey gasped. "Now wa't does you s'pose—huh?"

"Sh!" cautioned the turnkey, pushing the two toward the clear space in front of the judge's seat.

The eyes of all the spectators were turned upon the two young prisoners, but the judge did not look up from the ledger he was thumbing. Everything was hushed to silence—a silence that seemed the lull preceding dire disaster.

"Mickey Marvel!" came in a hoarse croak from the tall desk.

Everybody started and exchanged wondering glances, and several shook their heads ominously. Barney turned pale and said to his companion in an awe-struck whisper:

"It is the Witch-Crow, Mickey!"

But the latter skeptically shook his head.

"It is!" Barney insisted. "Sh!" again cautioned the officer having the prisoners in charge.

And again silence reigned.

"Who brings the charge of stealing against this boy?" asked the judge, his hoarse voice breaking into a strident falsetto at the end of the sentence.

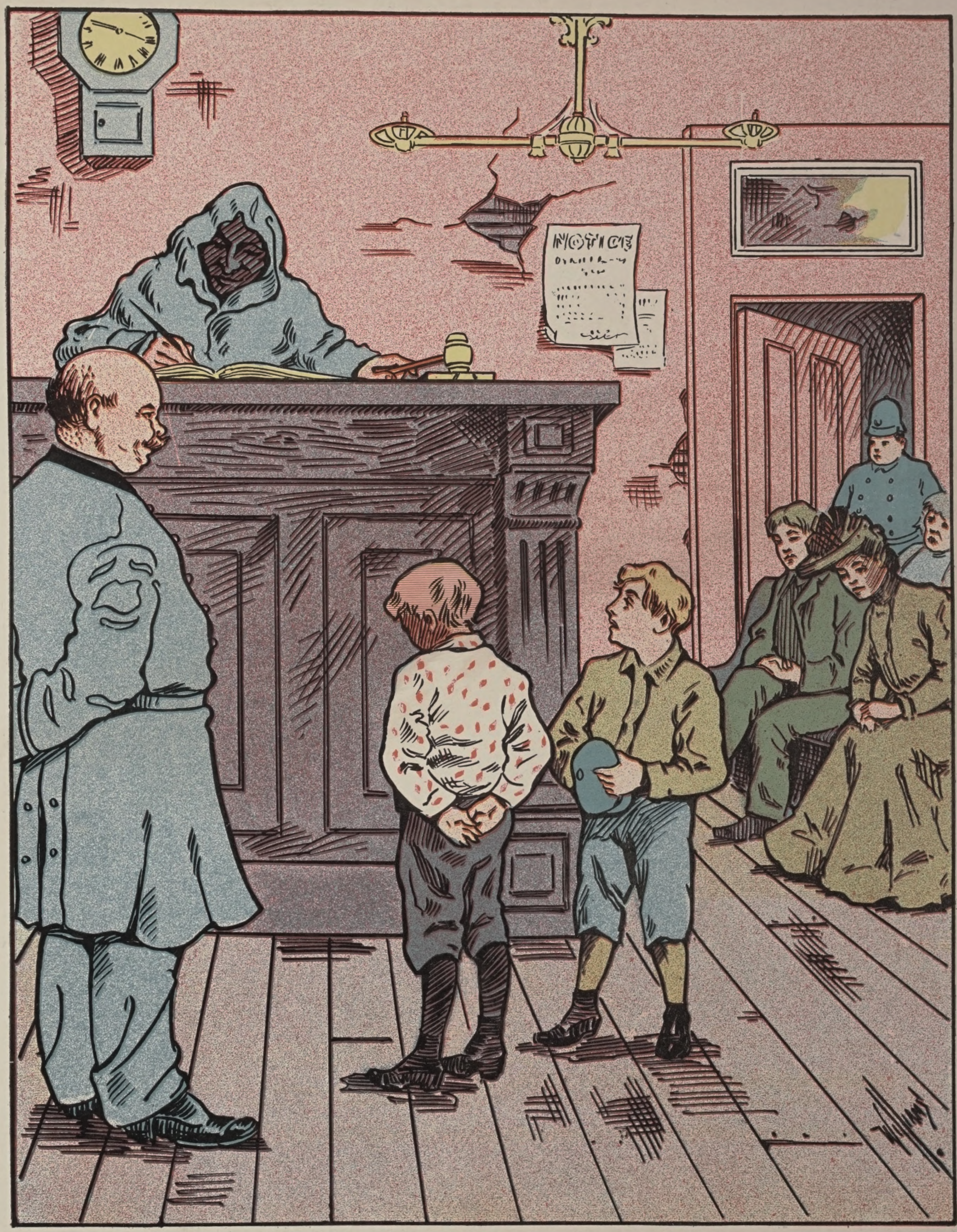
The policeman who had arrested Mickey arose and said: "Your Honor, I arrested him on the charge of breaking open slot-machines and tapping tills. But of the witnesses I depended on to convict him, some have failed to appear, while others decline to testify, on the ground that they know nothing of his guilt or innocence. So, Your Honor, I recommend that the prisoner be discharged."

Mickey heaved a sigh of infinite relief, Barney looked the satisfaction he felt, and everybody breathlessly awaited the judge's decision.

"Mickey Marvel is discharged," came in a husky, muffled voice from the high desk.

But His Honor did not lift his eyes from the open book before him, and no one could catch a glimpse of his features concealed in the shadow of the ample hood he wore.

Then he went on:



"Mickey Marvel!" Came in a Hoarse Croak From the Desk.

"And officer, I sentence you to pay to the prisoner the sum of one hundred dollars as damages for false imprisonment, and to spend thirty days in jail. When court is adjourned you can pay over to Mr. Marvel the sum I have named and then go and lock yourself up. Haw, haw, haw!"

The policeman's fat face went white, and he collapsed into a rotund heap, his eyes bulging. The spectators sat and stared, open mouthed, and Mickey gasped in sheer astonishment. Barney felt that surely the end of all things was near at hand, for the rattling chuckle of the judge was the harsh cackle of the Witch-Crow to a nicety.

"Barney Bylow is charged with highway robbery. Who appears against him?"

At the judge's words, the young man of the automobile arose and came forward.

"Your Honor," he said, "I preferred the charge of highway robbery against the boy, but I've recovered my money and I withdraw the charge."

"Haw, haw, haw! Law, law, law!" cackled the judge. "So you've recovered your money, eh? Good—very good! Did Barney Bylow give it back to you?"

"N—o," the young man said hesitatingly.

"Didn't he have it?"

"I—I guess not."

"But you got your money back?"

"Yes."

"Miss Brainard restored the amount to you, to keep you from prosecuting the boy; I know all about it." The judge chuckled huskily, and the young man and Miss Brainard exchanged surprised and wondering glances. "Will you swear, young man, that Barney Bylow did not rob you?"

"Yes—no, that is—I—I—" And the young man stopped, covered with confusion.

Miss Brainard arose and came forward, smiling graciously.

"Your Honor," she murmured sweetly, putting a plump arm around Barney's neck and drawing him to her, "I'm ready to swear that this boy didn't rob anyone."

"Then the prisoner's discharged," the judge grumbled gruffly, "and court's adjourned. Now you people clear out of here, all except Barney Bylow; I want to talk with him."

The people began to file out slowly and reluctantly. Barney stood spell-bound, wondering what was going to happen to him. He thought of turning and dashing away, but, for some reason, his legs refused to perform their office. Miss Brainard put both arms around the lad and bent and kissed him, murmuring brokenly:

"There—there, dear! Don't fret; you shan't be hurt. Be quiet; I'll be in again soon."

He looked up into her face, and was greatly surprised to find that she much resembled his mother—only younger, much younger. Then he stood with eyes half closed, wondering what she meant by her words—wondering until his brain reeled and his limbs trembled.

With an effort of the will he aroused himself and swept his eyes around the big, gloomy room. It was empty of people, apparently. He was alone; Mickey, even, had deserted him. Involuntarily he glanced toward the judge's desk. The black figure had disappeared. No! There it was, coming toward him mincing and teetering. It was the Witch-Crow—yes, it was the Witch-Crow in form and dress, but her hood was thrown back, and the face was the face of his mother—and beaming with love and tenderness!

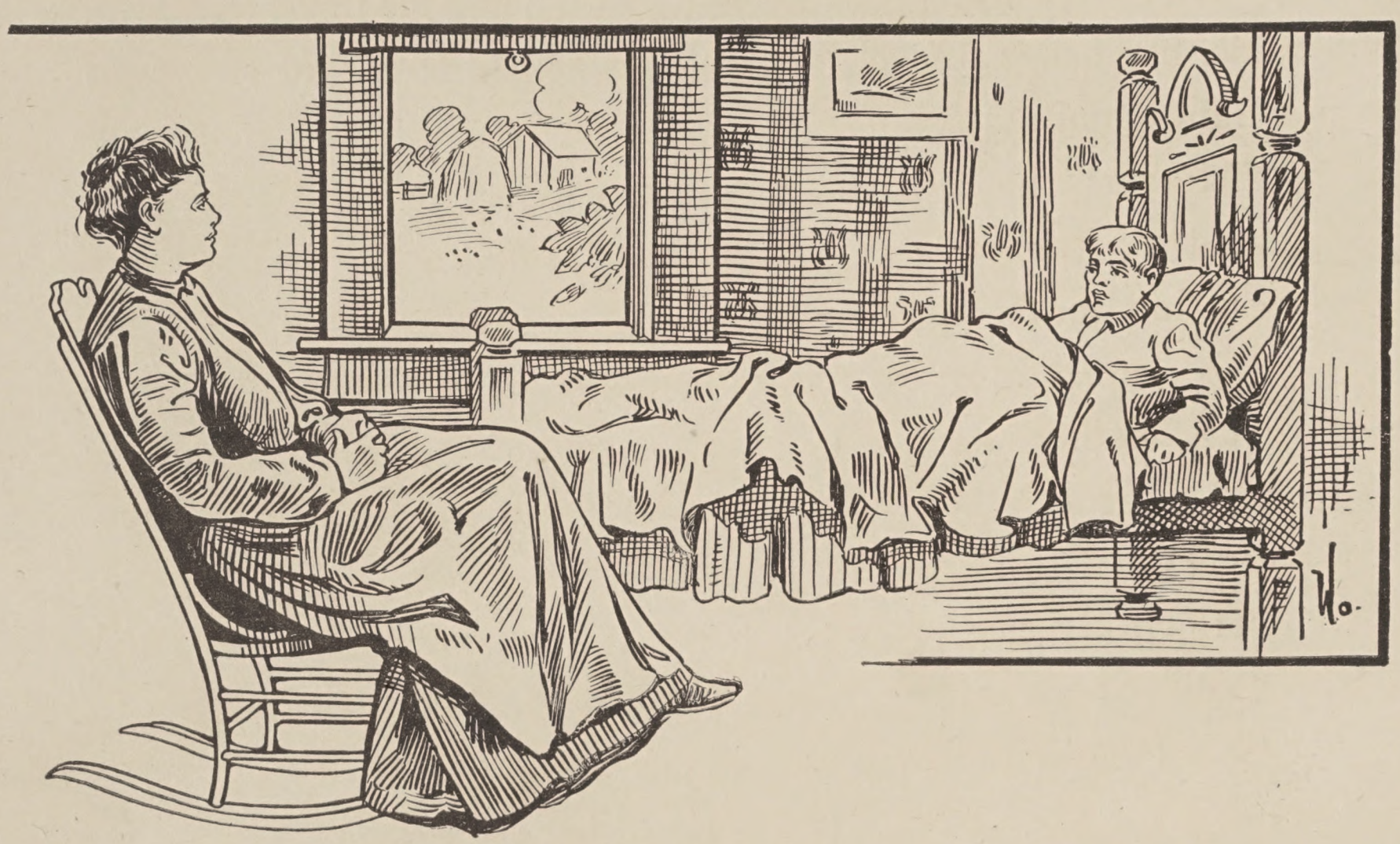
Was it his mother, or was it the Witch-Crow? He wondered, he pondered, he puzzled. She came up to him, and he did not shrink from her. She put an arm around him and patted his cheek, and he nestled close to her! He heard her say softly:

"Poor boy—poor, dear boy! And you want to go home, do you? Well, shut your eyes, and when you open them you'll be at home; the doctor says you will. That's it—that's it! Close your eyes and sleep—sleep!"

Barney felt himself tottering, falling. Somebody caught him and laid him down gently. Then all was blackness—oblivion.

"Why—why, I'm in bed!"

Barney raised himself upon his elbow and looked around him. But he felt weak and dizzy, so he lay back again.



"Yes, I'm in bed—in my own bed—at home," he whispered to himself, letting his eyes rest upon the well-known objects of his little bedroom.

It was so. There was the rag carpet and the prints upon the walls. He recognized the familiar pattern of the wall paper; he passed his fingers over the raised figures of the counterpane. He

was at home—in his own room—in his own bed. The forenoon sunshine streamed in at the open window; the odor of flowers made the air sweet and heavy. He heard the birds singing, the chickens cackling. And who was that seated in a low rocking-chair near his bedside, her hands folded in her lap, her head bowed in weariness and light slumber?"

"Mother!" he called.

And he was surprised at the sound of his own voice, it was so weak and quavering.

His mother arose instantly and came to him.

"Yes, mother's here, dear," she said soothingly. Then, a pleased expression lighting her careworn countenance, "Why, you're awake —you're yourself Barney!"

"How did I get home?"

"You've been at home all the time, dear."

"No I haven't," he cried petulantly. "I've been to the city; I've—"

She put her finger upon his lips and said gently:

"There—there! You mustn't talk any more for the present; you've been very ill for several days. You got overheated in the hay lot, and your father found you unconscious when he went to haul in the hay. Now go to sleep again—that's a good boy. When you're stronger, you may tell me all about where you've been and

what you've seen. Although"—smiling down at him—"you've told me much about it already."

Barney felt a delicious languor stealing over him, so he obediently closed his eyes and fell asleep again.

When he was stronger, he told his mother and father of all the vagaries of his delirium, concluding:

"The crow I saw in the tree, and the book I'd been reading—'The Waifs of New York,' that Uncle Dick gave me—made me dream it all, I suppose."

His mother smiled and kissed him; his father remarked dryly:

"There's a lesson in it, at any rate, Barney."

Barney grinned broadly.

"I've learned the lesson," he replied.

THE END

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